

The Steps Program in New Orleans, Louisiana

Funding Period: 2003–2008

CDC's Steps Program funds states, cities, and tribal groups to implement community-based chronic disease prevention programs to reduce the burden of obesity, diabetes, and asthma by addressing three related risk factors: physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use. Steps-funded programs are showing what can be done locally in schools, work sites, communities, and health care settings to promote healthier lifestyles and help people make long-lasting and sustainable changes that can reduce their risk for chronic diseases.

Background

The Steps to a Healthier New Orleans program focuses its programmatic efforts on people most burdened by chronic diseases, including low-income city residents and minority groups, particularly blacks or African Americans. According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, almost 26% of Orleans Parish residents lived below the federal poverty level in 2005, and the median household income was \$30,216. Today, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Steps to a Healthier New Orleans Program is playing a large role in bringing partners together to support citywide initiatives that will help make New Orleans a healthier, better-prepared city.

Spotlight on Success

- The New Orleans school system changed drastically after Hurricane Katrina hit the area in 2005. Before the storm, the New Orleans Public School system operated 128 schools in the city. Now, 23 distinct entities operate 58 public and charter schools. Flooding and fragmentation of the school system resulted in lost health records, policy manuals, and health curricula. Some school nurses were new to the field and many were functioning without a medical advisor or a link to their peers. Additionally, many new administrators were unaware of state and federal school health policies. Preliminary conversations with a small group of school nurses revealed a need for coordination and capacity building. Steps convened health staff members from each school to create an opportunity to share resources and build relationships. With assistance from Steps, this group of nurses has grown to a coalition with representatives from 41 of the 58 schools. The work group is acting to unify health policies and practices across schools, increase the capacity of school staff, and link schools to community resources.
- The New Orleans Steps Program organized several programs to promote physical activity and healthy eating in the community. Interventions included sending out grassroots health care messages through church-based nurses and lay health educators, and increasing the availability of healthy foods such as fresh fruits, low-fat milk, and whole grains in neighborhood corner stores through partnerships formed by Steps Community Intermediaries projects.

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are integral to the success of the Steps Program in New Orleans. Partnerships consist of both traditional and nontraditional partners, including health care providers, faith-based organizations, cooperative extension services, and academic institutions. The Louisiana Public Health Institute, Daughters of Charity Services of New Orleans, Louisiana Council on Obesity Prevention and Management, EXCELth, Black Women's Health Project of Louisiana, and New Orleans Public Schools are just some of Steps partner organizations. These varied groups help steer the strategies and execution of interventions in the New Orleans Steps community.

Contact

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