

The Steps Program in Santa Cruz County, Arizona

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

Santa Cruz County borders Mexico in south-central Arizona and has a history dating back to the cultures of the Apache, Yaqui, and Hohokam peoples. It is the smallest county in the state, with a population of 40,267; about 85% of residents are Hispanic or Latino. The median household income is \$33,491, and more than 20% of county residents live below the federal poverty level (2005 U.S. Census Bureau estimates). In 2005 the unemployment rate was just over 15% and only about 39% of county residents had graduated high school. The towns of Nogales and Patagonia have federal designations as Medically Underserved and Primary Care Provider Shortage areas. The Santa Cruz County Steps Program is working with schools, health care providers, employers and employees at work sites, and community leaders to build healthier Hispanic and Latino communities.

Spotlight on Success

- This Steps Program and its partners conduct physical activity and nutrition education sessions for Santa Cruz County's older adult population in cooperation with the Santa Cruz Council on Aging in Patagonia, Nogales, Rio Rico, and Tubac. Each site provides weekly opportunities to participate in physical activity to improve seniors' strength, cardiovascular health, balance, and function; in 2006, nearly 350 seniors participated. Nutrition education is provided at food bank distribution sites in these same communities once a month, where attendees participate in food demonstrations and receive healthy recipes.
- The Steps Program held workshops to train school employees in the use of CDC's School Health Index. In two districts, 95% of schools used the School Health Index to write action plans for improving employee and student health and guiding the development of federally mandated wellness policies. Activities included making improvements to a work-site wellness program for school staff members, and one of the school districts started allowing students to have active play time at recess in 100% of its elementary schools. Read more of this success story in *The Steps Program in Action*, available at www.cdc.gov/steps/success_stories/pdf/santa_cruz.pdf.

Community Partnerships

A wide range of community partners help guide Santa Cruz County's Steps Program activities, including the Carondelet Holy Cross Hospital, Nogales United School District #1, Santa Cruz Valley United School District #35, Santa Cruz County School Superintendent's Office, Salud por Vida Gym, Nogales Recreation Department, University of Arizona–Santa Cruz County Cooperative Extension service, Santa Cruz County Planning & Zoning Director, SouthEastern Arizona Governments Organization–Council on Aging, Santa Cruz Council on Aging, Santa Cruz County Food Bank, area alternative schools, and the Southeast Arizona Area Health Education Center, Inc.

Contact

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