

Broome County's Steps Program

Helping control diabetes and obesity



What is the public health problem?

Because it is associated with a range of health problems and can lead to the development of diabetes and other chronic diseases, obesity is a major public health concern in Broome County. According to a 2006* Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey in the Broome County Steps Program intervention area, more than three in every five respondents reported being either overweight or obese.

How Steps is responding

The Broome County Steps Program is reaching families in rural areas by implementing an innovative walking program, BC Walks, and helping 15 school districts create a consolidated bid to purchase healthy foods at lower cost. In addition, along with the Office for Aging and the local YMCA, the Steps Program expanded the county's nationally recognized Mission Meltaway program, which incorporates diabetes prevention strategies and encourages lifestyle changes by using a group approach to weight management. It features eight weekly support group meetings covering such topics as menu planning, nutrition, physical activity, and mental health. The Broome County YMCA offers free 8-week memberships to Mission Meltaway participants and provides comparative "before and after" weight, blood pressure, body mass index, and hip-to-waist ratio measurements.

What is the impact?

- BC Walks has enrolled more than 80,000 participants in the last 4 years. In one year, the percentage of people in the community who walked for 30 minutes or more, 5 days a week, increased from 53% to 61%.
- Making healthy foods more affordable for schools has resulted in a 14% increase in fruit and vegetable consumption at district schools.
- More than 90 Mission Meltaway programs have reached over 3,000 people, 80% of whom were at risk for diabetes due to their overweight or obesity. Participants who completed the program lost more than 5 pounds on average. In one Mission Meltaway program, 91 of the 100 participants lost weight, 65 increased their physical activity levels, and all 100 improved their knowledge of proper nutrition and exercise after only 4 weeks in the program.

Why this program is working

According to *The Guide to Community Preventive Services*,[†] interventions that focus on building social networks that support behavior change are effective in increasing physical activity, which can help with weight control. Recent studies have shown that weight loss and regular physical activity can delay the onset of diabetes among people at high risk of developing the disease.[‡]

* Most recent data available

† <http://www.thecommunityguide.org>

‡ <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/consumer/prevent.htm>