

Community Health Workers fill health gap in healthy corner store program

By Anna Thornton Matos, MPH

SUMMARY

The Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) subcommittee of the Health Improvement Partnership-Cuyahoga (HIP-Cuyahoga) with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) funds, initiated in 2014 a healthy food retail program targeting corner stores in six neighborhoods in Cleveland and East Cleveland. REACH staff partnered with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Good Food Here (GFH) marketing campaign to recruit and promote GFH branded stores, other partners were able to provide health screenings.

CHALLENGE

High blood pressure remains a risk factor for many residents. Health screenings help identify risk and provide other resources. Partners from several sectors came together to conduct outreach events at stores that had progressed through several phases of the GFH program model. Events included community health workers to provide health screenings. Clinical health screenings are great community resources; however, there are limitations for some residents to participate in clinic based screenings. Community-based screenings have more flexibility and can be set up anywhere, such as the parking lot of a corner store in the urban core. Community members benefit from people from their own community conducting the health screenings. While some neighbors see blighted corner stores, they might indeed be the only food access point for people without the ability to travel very far from their home.

Your Involvement is Key

Community Health Workers are a critical partner in health care delivery to our most vulnerable communities. Find your local community health worker network to engage and collaborate on public health strategies in your area! For more information on Cleveland State University's CHW program, see <https://www.csuohio.edu/nursing/continuing-education/community-health-worker-certification-program>

For more *information about Good Food Here program* please visit <http://hipcuyahoga.org/good-food-here/>



“The residents get health care without the barriers of money, insurance, or transportation at a familiar place they're used to going to. We bring quality health care to them at the corner store.”

- Eileen Salters, CHW

SOLUTION

The GFH program's high level of involvement from CHAs, in the development and implementation of the initiative has assured community buy-in and sustainability. Indeed, one of the most prominent CHAs, trained also as a Community Health Worker (CHW), suggested a partnership between GFH and the CHWs. Many partners came together to organize neighborhood outreach events to increase awareness of health promotion opportunities and screen those at risk for chronic diseases. Partnering with the CHW program at Cleveland State University is mutually beneficial by providing opportunities for CHWs to receive clinical credit hours for time spent in the field at events providing screenings and resources.

RESULTS

Approximately 135 community members were screened by CHWs at events in all seven REACH targeted neighborhoods across the City of Cleveland and East Cleveland over the past two years with a significant number of CHWs earning clinical hours towards certification. The CHW program now has established connections with four community-based organizations within the City of Cleveland that can continue to call upon the CHW connection to provide health screenings at GFH outreach events and other community events, such as street fairs. Success is built upon the CHW tenet that sharing social, cultural and experiential connections with the residents and communities where they work affects behavior. It has been well documented that there is a higher level of compliance when patients hear a health message from someone with whom they can relate.

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SUSTAINING SUCCESS

To date over forty community resident leaders of both the REACH target neighborhoods and other neighborhoods have been trained to carry on the program (including outreach events) within their communities. This includes programming at stores where relationships have been established, how to recruit and maintain new stores into the program and guidance on connecting with community organizational partners like Community Development Corporations, including the established connections mentioned above. In addition, the training includes guidance on connecting to the CHW pipeline for health screenings at local corner stores. National partner organization, The Food Trust, is funded to continue to train residents in GFH model in the Cleveland area.



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