

Coalition Brings Residents Together to Create a Healthier Oceana County, MI

Katie Miller

Summary

A project in Oceana County, Michigan, funded in part by the National WIC Association (NWA) has inspired 16 local organizations to collaborate as a community coalition. The coalition, Healthy Families of Oceana County (HFOC) has engaged with a variety of stakeholders and community groups to develop resources that encourage access to healthy foods and clinical services. With the help of coalition participants, nearly 20,000 County residents will have improved access to resources that prevent chronic conditions.

Challenge

Chronic diseases, such as obesity and heart disease, are prominent issues among Oceana County residents. Data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revealed that nearly 34% of the population is obese, while 65% report high blood cholesterol and 11% suffer from diabetes. Adding to this is the fact that Oceana County has been identified as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Thus, residents with chronic conditions are unable to receive the services they need to appropriately care for their health. In addition, those without chronic health issues are unable to access the resources they need to adequately prevent conditions from developing- including resources such as preventive health care services and nutritious, affordable foods.

Solution

District Health Department #10 received funding from the NWA to conduct a project in Oceana County that will address chronic diseases through policy, system, and environmental strategies. The first step in the project involved gathering together community stakeholders and agency representatives for a discussion on the issues of nutrition and healthcare access and how they contribute to chronic diseases in the community. The group formed into what became a new coalition: "Healthy Families of Oceana County". Since its formation, HFOC has collaborated with local organizations and advocates to establish linkages between the community and health care providers, and to educate and encourage the public to make healthy food choices.



HFOC logo

Your Involvement is Key

You can help the HFOC coalition achieve its goal of making healthy foods and healthcare services more accessible to the public by exploring what resources are available in your community, and whether or not these resources meet your needs, and the needs of your family and neighbors. You may contact the coalition with any questions, comments, or concerns as you work towards helping to improve the resources in your immediate community..



Produce Market at DHD#10

Results

The HFOC coalition currently consists of 29 members from 16 local organizations and agencies. Through the collaboration of its members, HFOC has developed a detailed Community Action Plan for Oceana County, with specific objectives and activities that will help to improve the health landscape of the community. Policy, system, and environmental (PSE) strategies will be used to improve awareness of healthy food options and also increase access to health services. These PSE strategies include, but are not limited to: a healthy food labeling initiative, a prescription referral for the local WIC program, and the development of resource guides to assist residents in finding services. Beyond the immediate scope of the project, the HFOC coalition has enabled representatives from local agencies to work together on various community-benefit and outreach activities that help to bring resources directly to the public.

Contact

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Members of the HFOC coalition

"HFOC has done a fantastic job at mobilizing diverse stakeholders in the community to participate in the coalition. The impact of HFOC will be greater because of the community's involvement in the project."

- Rachel Uganski, Benefit Outreach Coordinator, Mercy Health

Sustainable Success

The primary goal of HFOC is to improve access to healthy foods and clinical services for two-thirds of the county population. HFOC plans to do this by strengthening existing partnerships and cultivating new partnerships with local organizations, as a way to encourage continued collaboration between a diverse group of community partners. In addition, HFOC plans to empower community members to be actively involved with the project activities. It is HFOC's mission to help improve the health landscape of Oceana County, so that local residents can easily access the services and resources they need to maintain a healthy life. With the help of its members and community partners, the mission of HFOC can be made a reality for the community.



HFOC members Katie Miller and Meryl Smith, with NWA project manager, Quinney Harris, and business owner, Kathy Winston, at Trailside Restaurant's menu guide release.



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