Partners 4 Health Project: Advancing Health In KC through Community Partnerships

by: Brenda Brewer, WIC Director, Truman Medical Centers

SUMMARY
Partners 4 Health is a project in Kansas City, Missouri, that was funded by the National WIC Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A leadership team guides the project and includes a physician, staff from WIC and several other organizations, as well as community members who are participants in the WIC program. Directed by the leadership team, the project seeks to improve access to healthy foods by working with mobile markets and local grocers and improve clinical-community linkages in an underserved part of the city.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY
Everyone in our community deserves the same chance to live a healthy life! Partners 4 Health is a project that is working to make it easier to choose healthy foods and connect people to community supports.

This project seeks to build on what’s already happening in the community and make the healthy choice the easy choice! Parents, organizations and community members will plan and guide the project.

Contact Truman Medical Center WIC or Children’s Mercy Weighing In to learn more.

CHALLENGE
Chronic diseases have serious and negative impacts on Kansas City’s health. Residents in the Linwood Corridor often lack access to quality, healthy foods. In this “food desert,” few stores are authorized to accept WIC, contributing to the problem of low access to healthy, affordable fruits and vegetables. Healthcare providers are not always able to connect to community supports that might help patients prevent disease.

Prevention efforts must start early, especially in relation to nutrition and physical activity. Primary care and WIC provide ideal settings for prevention. However, WIC participants are not often involved in creating the solutions within their own communities. The voice of the busy healthcare provider is often absent as well. Community organizations struggle to align together on policy, systems or environmental change strategies needed to prevent chronic disease.

“Being on the leadership committee is more than a project to me. This is an opportunity to effect change in the community lifestyle in and outside of the patient office visit. A rare opportunity for a clinician!”

- Dr. Cymanthia Connell
SOLUTION
Truman Medical Center WIC program received a grant from National WIC Association to implement a project that will address chronic disease, through engaging partners and addressing policy, systems and environmental change. A first step of the project was forming a leadership team to identify needs, guide planning, and connect with key partners. The leadership team needed representation of organizations, but also healthcare providers and WIC participants as well. Engaging WIC participants and healthcare providers in planning and guiding the project, through the leadership team, ensures that the strategies and outcomes address the needs of the target audience.

RESULTS
Several WIC participants, a physician, the executive director of the neighborhood YMCA, WIC staff, and staff from Children’s Mercy Hospital's Weighing In coalition make up the Partners 4 Health leadership team. The leadership team meets at least monthly. Everyone's voices and perspectives have contributed to development of a Community Action Plan to address needs and build on strengths in the community. The team has chosen to focus on increasing the number of places that accept WIC, including working to support a local mobile market to become a WIC-authorized vendor. The team is also working with healthcare providers to assess for healthy behaviors and potentially include prescriptions for interventions like exercise or fruits and vegetables.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS
The leadership team has worked to identify strategies that can build on current efforts, align with others in the community and that have a high likelihood of being sustainable. The Partners 4 Health project is looking for ways to continue the momentum built by those in the community who are already utilizing a consistent community message- "12345 Fit-Tastic!"- to promote healthy behaviors. The leadership team members are leveraging their existing networks to engage other community partners, ensuring the project can continue. Everyone on the leadership team is dedicated to the health of the community and we hope that we can continue to work together even after the grant officially ends.

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Success Stories
http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/