

Mobilizing Funding Support to Battle Overweight and Obesity



“We looked to *The Community Guide* for direction and the best strategies, rather than doing the same things over and over without impact.”

Nancy Forlifer, MA
Director of Community Health
and Wellness
Western Maryland Health System

More Information

Western Maryland Health System

www.wmhs.com or
www.makehealthychoices.org

The Community Guide:
Task Force Recommendations
On Obesity Prevention and
Control
www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity

The Community Guide:
Task Force Recommendations
On Physical Activity
www.thecommunityguide.org/pa

Division of Nutrition, Physical
Activity, and Obesity, CDC
www.cdc.gov/nccdpdp/dnpao

Despite efforts to combat overweight and obesity, the American waistline continues to expand. In the last 20 years, obesity rates among adults and children have increased dramatically and remain high in communities across the country.¹ Counties served by the Western Maryland Health System (WMHS) are no different; rates in these areas have risen steadily.² To make a sustainable impact on obesity in their region, WMHS implemented a systematic health strategy that leveraged funding and partnerships. The findings and recommendations of the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) in *The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide)* provided the basis for an action strategy centered on behavioral, social, and environmental change. WMHS used an evidence-based approach to strengthen grant applications to obtain funding.

Local health system seeks long-term solution

WMHS, a comprehensive healthcare organization serving six counties in Maryland, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania, faced a growing overweight and obesity problem. Between 2001 and 2008, according to Nancy Forlifer, director of Community Health and Wellness at WMHS, “The percentage of obese adults increased from 24 to 29 percent, and in 2011, 20 percent of the school-aged children were obese.” WMHS set up activities to promote weight loss such as community contests, but they found that results from these programs were temporary.” Evidence showed that these areas were not the best place to put our time, efforts, and funds,” says Ms. Forlifer. “We looked to convert these short-term improvements to long-term success by involving community partners and using interventions proven to work.”

Initial funding setback helps focus efforts

Determined to make a lasting impact on the community, WMHS sought an evidence-based approach to promote weight loss and prevent obesity. They recruited community partners to help assess local needs and develop strategies. Together with partners, WMHS applied for a grant with CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield to fund these activities. According to Ms. Forlifer, CareFirst was unwilling to fund the planning phase and denied the application, stating, “You do the research on your own, and then resubmit for funding to implement your program.” Undeterred and unfunded, that’s exactly what WMHS and its partners did.

Using CDC’s *Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States*, WMHS conducted a community health needs assessment. The staff evaluated environmental health factors, such as the numbers of grocery stores and miles of sidewalks, and interviewed local officials and other leaders to better understand how health-related policies affect the community. After analyzing the data, WMHS selected interventions that would have the greatest impact.



www.thecommunityguide.org

What is *The Community Guide*?

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based findings and recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid body of public health and prevention experts—bases its findings and recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.



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The Community Guide influences new action plan

WMHS turned to *The Community Guide* to inform the development of a stronger funding proposal that would identify Task Force recommendations that best addressed their community needs assessment. WMHS chose evidence-based strategies that target obesity and physical activity through behavioral, social, environmental, and policy changes. The Task Force recommendations used included:

- Behavioral interventions to reduce screen time
- Community-wide campaigns to increase physical activity
- Social support interventions in community settings
- Creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities

WMHS puts its plan into action

With a clearer picture of the community's needs and a comprehensive evidence-based plan of action, WMHS's second funding proposal was successful. In 2011, CareFirst and Maryland Physicians Care awarded WMHS grants totaling \$125,000. WMHS used these funds to kick off various parts of their program—*Make Healthy Choices Easy*. Two parts of the program were based on findings and recommendations from *The Community Guide*:

- A "Turn Off Challenge" aimed at reducing the amount of time people watch television and play video games
- Two "Mall Movers" walking groups to encourage community-wide organized physical activity, social support, and enhanced access to local facilities

WMHS secured more than 12 partnerships with local organizations as diverse as the Allegany County Board of Education, the Country Club Mall, and the YMCA. "As we implement these programs influenced by *The Community Guide*, we find that more people are interested in being partners with us," says Ms. Forlifer. "Using the Task Force findings and recommendations in *The Community Guide*, we have mobilized funder support and are making strides toward combating the problem of obesity in our community."

Lessons Learned

- **Invest the time to gather the evidence.** Taking time to assess their community's needs and identify evidence-based interventions made the difference in obtaining the needed funds. Their persistence and use of an evidence-based approach eventually led to success.
- **Apply *The Community Guide*.** Use the Task Force recommendations from *The Community Guide* to support and enhance other programs and interventions that will benefit your community. Combined with data specific to the target population, the project's design and reach may be more effective.
- **Combine interventions and partners.** The combination of behavioral, social, and environmental strategies can impact a population more strongly than a single strategy. Involving partners in different community sectors can improve the reach of each intervention. A varied approach increases the likelihood that the message will take hold within the community.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. U.S. Obesity Trends. www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/trends.html. Accessed on March 20, 2012.

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005-2010. <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/BRFSS-SMART/SelQuickViewChart.asp>. Accessed on March 23, 2012.