

Stories from the Field: Tennessee

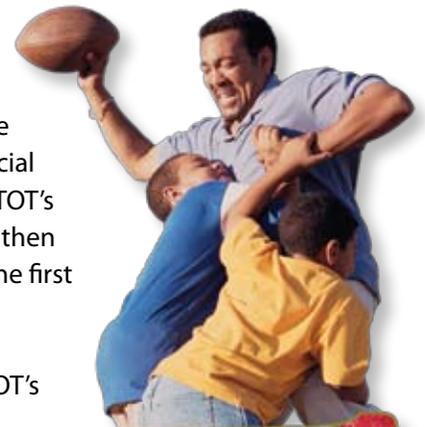


Tennessee Task Force Energized To Tackle Obesity

The Tennessee Department of Health had their eyes focused upon the ultimate prize—winning the game against a rising obesity epidemic in the state. Health care, education, and fitness professionals across the state knew a well executed game plan was needed to secure a victorious feat for Tennesseans health and quality of life.

Prior attempts from the state health department led to some degree of success in the fields of legislation, coordinated school health, and vending. But sustaining these endeavors was a seesaw battle. Without funding or a centralized obesity focus area, prevention efforts were uncoordinated and connections with obesity prevention partners were difficult to sustain.

In 2007, Tennessee was invited to attend the Southern Obesity Summit in Arkansas—the nation’s first organized regional response to obesity epidemic in southern states. Attended by more than 200 representatives from 14 southern states, the summit was designed to provide a place for exchanging resources, ideas, and lessons learned. Inspired by the message of solidarity endorsed during the conference, concerned Tennessee stakeholders huddled together to kickoff the Tennessee Obesity Taskforce (TOT). As a special team of advisors to the health department, TOT’s purpose is to enhance teamwork and strengthen partnerships. According to Dr. Jo Edwards, the first Chair of the Task Force, “Diseases will not be stemmed without a unified set of goals and strategies for our state.” With this in mind, TOT’s



first action was to partner with the state department to apply for CDC 805 funding. It was the move that capped the rally. With additional funds, the state drafted additional players to develop a game plan for tackling obesity in the state. Partners from multiple sectors joined the taskforce while seasoned partners contributed to the improved strength of the group. To date, organizations are being recruited as state champions. Beginning with 45 people from 31 organizations (major universities, hospitals, obesity coalitions, and privately owned institutions), the membership body of the TOT has grown to more than 200 organizations and more than 400 individual’s strong.



Importance of Early Success

Tennessee is excited about the state plan “Eat Well, Play More Tennessee” and their ability to run forward with prevention. Building relationships and a team of state partners has allowed for the formation of the Tennessee Obesity Taskforce (TOT)—an impressive lineup of professionals that will continue to implement new ideas for obesity prevention and assist in creating places where Tennessean’s can make healthy choices for eating and active living.



Lessons Learned

With funding and the united front of a new task force, momentum was in place to advance toward the goal, but a few challenges to blocked their path. According to Laurie Stanton, director, Office of Child Nutrition & Wellness, “We experienced difficulties in the approval process of getting contractors in place and hiring dedicated staff. The hiring of staff finally occurred within the second year and with a full team ready to move forward with TOT, a state plan was developed... Eat Well, Play More Tennessee.”

- Be familiar with your state policies and procedures around contracting or RFP process.
- Recruit as many advocates as possible to your cause.
- When work is impeded at the state level, work with partners to ensure continuity in efforts.
- Realize the importance of strategic planning with multiple partners to develop a comprehensive consistent approach to obesity within the state.



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Resources:

Tennessee Obesity Task Force Web site:
<http://healthpsych.psy.vanderbilt.edu/TOT/index.asp>

