Prevention Research Centers

How CDC Supports Research and Helps Translate Results Into Effective Public Health Strategies

CDC provides leadership, technical assistance, and oversight to a network of 25 Prevention Research Centers (PRCs) to conduct innovative public health research at the community level. PRCs are located in accredited schools of public health or schools of medicine or osteopathy with a preventive medicine residency program.

PRCs work to prevent chronic diseases and other diseases in communities and populations that lack access to preventive and primary care services across the United States. The current funding cycle is 2019 to 2024. Specifically, the university-based PRCs:

- Conduct research to identify and develop effective public health prevention programs and strategies.
- Identify the best way to implement these programs and strategies.
- Include communities in the research process when developing and conducting studies so that the resulting interventions are relevant to the populations they are intended to help.
- Focus on behavioral and environmental policies, programs, and strategies that help prevent chronic diseases.
- Share their technical expertise with community partners, as well as with health and public health partners at all levels.

Research Projects

Each PRC conducts a core research project over 5 years that addresses behavioral and environmental factors on topics such as cancer, obesity, smoking, or substance abuse. PRCs also work with partners to conduct special interest projects (SIPs), which are funded by CDC and other US Department of Health and Human Services agencies.

Special Interest Projects. SIPs focus on a specific topic of interest or gap in scientific evidence. SIPs are competitively awarded to researchers at currently funded schools of public health and schools of medicine in the PRC network.

Primary Areas of Current PRC Research

- OBESITY, NUTRITION, & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
- HEALTHY HEART ISSUES
- SEXUAL HEALTH
- VIOLENCE
- CANCER
- SMOKING & SUBSTANCE ABUSE

PRC Prevention Research Centers

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Population Health

Thematic Research Networks. Some SIPs fund groups of PRCs to work together on a specific health topic. The current thematic research networks are Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network, Managing Epilepsy Well Network, Nutrition and Obesity Policy Research and Evaluation, and Physical Activity Policy Research and Evaluation.

Examples of Public Health Impact

EnhanceFitness Increases Physical Activity for Older Adults

EnhanceFitness is a low-cost group exercise program that helps improve physical and mental functioning in older adults. Developed by the University of Washington PRC, it is one of five physical activity programs recommended by CDC's Arthritis Program to improve the quality of life for people with arthritis. EnhanceFitness has been offered at over 1,250 sites in 43 states and has reached more than 74,000 people.

Pasos Adelante Helps Reduce Disease Risk

Pasos Adelante (Steps Forward) is a lifestyle intervention that focuses on Mexican Americans who want to reduce their risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Created by the University of Arizona PRC, the program uses community health workers, who lead sessions on chronic disease prevention by focusing on physical activity and nutrition. Participants were able to reduce their body mass index, blood pressure, and total cholesterol. *Pasos Adelante* has expanded to urban Arizona and Mexico.

PEARLS Reduces Depression in People With Epilepsy

PEARLS (Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives) is an effective home-based program for treating depression in adults with epilepsy. Developed by the University of Washington PRC, PEARLS is delivered by a trained counselor in a person's home in eight sessions. Participants learn how to address issues that contribute to depression, such as social isolation and lack of physical activity. Participants in the PEARLS program were less depressed and had fewer suicidal thoughts than nonparticipants over 12 to 18 months. PEARLS is available in 18 states.

Telemedicine Increases Eye Exams for People With Diabetes

The Oregon Health and Science University PRC found that an eye disease related to poorly managed diabetes, called diabetic retinopathy, is common among American Indians and Alaska Natives in Pacific Northwest communities because of poor access to eye doctors. They developed a telemedicine approach that uses telecommunication and information technologies to provide clinical health care from a distance. In clinics in Kansas and Oregon, the percentage of patients with diabetes who completed annual eye exams increased from 56% to 94% within the first year of enrollment.

Investments and Productivity

CDC funds each PRC to conduct high-quality, multi-disciplinary research to promote health and prevent disease. This investment creates effective research centers, which in turn may lead to funding from other governmental and nongovernmental organizations. For example, for every $1 the PRCs received from CDC in 2014–2016, they were able to generate an average of $4.85 in research funds from other sources. As a result, PRCs are able to conduct hundreds of public health research projects every year to prevent chronic diseases and other diseases.

From 2014 to 2016, PRCs:

- Trained over 39,000 people, including public health specialists and prevention researchers.
- Published 1,300 publications and 56 books.
- Gave 1,424 scientific presentations.