

Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities – Introduction

[Karma Harris] Hello everyone! My name is Karma Harris, and I'm a public health consultant with the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, also known as NACDD for short. I've had the privilege over the last few years of leading and managing the Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities project, which is a project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This project really brought an expert from the disability field to work with community partners, with the support of state organizations, to address physical inactivity, poor nutrition, tobacco use and exposure, and general accessibility issues among persons with disabilities. The National Center for Health, Physical Activity and Disability, also known as NCHPAD, provided additional support and access to disability inclusive tools and resources to their project participants, as well as to us at NACDD.

These projects worked with the five CDC State Disability and Health programs of Iowa, Montana, New York, Ohio, and Oregon, as well as two communities from each of these 5 states for a total of 10 communities. This model really works to implement new policy, systems, and environmental strategies that address issues that people with disabilities across community sectors face in each of the areas where they live, learn, work, play, and receive care.

A policy change is referred to any informal – or formal – policy, ordinance, resolution, protocol, procedure, agreement, or law that guides or influences behavior. It can be legislative or organizational; it can be governmental or non-governmental. It can mandate environmental changes or other actions, and it also increases the likelihood that these changes will be sustainable. Policies are usually written, and then they're signed or adopted through a voting process.

A systems change is a change that works at a systems level to affect a larger amount of people versus a single organization, such as an entire healthcare system, a school system, or large multi-employers. Systems changes often consist of policy changes that occur at a much larger, systemic level.

An environmental change is a change that involves physical, social, material, and/or architectural changes to the environment that influences behavior and/or practices of people within the environment. A designated program contact within each of the five State Disability and Health programs served as a State Expert Advisor, and they worked with myself and my team at NACDD and two of the Community Coaches in each community – which we also refer to as our local coordinators – in each of their respective states to do this work on the local-level. The Community Coaches participated in project trainings and worked with their local healthy community coalitions for three years to plan, implement and evaluate healthy living improvements to improve disability inclusion and accessibility within their communities.

This project really builds upon a previous Healthy Communities model used by NACDD and was modified to consist of six phases that really are a crucial part of the inclusive healthy community change processes that are focused on improving the health and well-being of people with disabilities. These phases are: phase one is the Commitment phase, phase two is the Assessment and Training phase, phase three is the Prioritization and Planning phase, phase four is Implementation, phase five is Evaluation, and phase six is Communication and Dissemination.

This podcast series will feature dialogue with each of our five State Expert Advisors as we highlight and discuss each of these six different phases of the inclusive Healthy Communities model. NACDD established the State Expert Advisor role — in efforts to link our funded communities with an actual state expert in disability and health topics — to provide ongoing support and resources to Community Coaches and Coalitions.

So, this State Expert Advisor in each of the states serves not only just as a disability subject matter expert and liaison to their communities, but also closely works with us at NACDD to bolster technical assistance for this project.