

Transforming the Health Profile of Arkansas: The University of Arkansas' High Obesity Program



University Partnership

CDC's High Obesity Program (HOP) promotes healthy eating and active living in counties that have more than 40% prevalence of adult obesity. CDC provides funds to land grant universities that work with communities — mostly in rural areas—whose residents may have less access to healthy foods and fewer opportunities to be physically active.

- The University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service works with local Extension staff in six counties and their partners to:
- Promote acceptance of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Women, Infants and Children (SNAP/WIC) benefits at food retailers.
- Increase healthy eating options with retailers and farmers' markets.
- Create and enhance safe places for physical activity with faith-based groups, city government planners, and youth.

Arkansas by the Numbers*

Arkansas HOP counties include: Chicot, Craighead, Jefferson, Monroe, Ouachita, and Woodruff.

In these counties:

- The estimated adult obesity prevalence ranges from 40.4% to 47.4%, well above the state adult obesity prevalence of 34.5%.
- The percentage of adults that report "reasonable" access to physical activity ranges from 7–65%.
- The percentage of children enrolled in public school eligible for free and reduced lunch ranges from 55.3% to 98.2%.

*These data were obtained at the time of funding.



Programs in Action

- Chicot County's Healing Hearts Coalition partnered with a local school to launch "From Classroom to Community," a program that engages students to make their communities healthier. One project resulted in the development of a new soccer field for students that is also open to the community outside of school hours.
- A coalition in Woodruff County obtained rent-free space at their Civic Center for food storage called "The Warehouse". The coalition holds monthly "Warehouse" events to distribute food, provide health resources and screenings, and conduct healthy cooking demonstrations.
- Extension staff in Ouachita County worked with a low-income housing complex to improve access to physical activity for residents with limited mobility. They identified a walking path and developed signs to indicate how many laps equaled a half-mile. Eighty-four percent of residents now walk regularly and use the path at least 1-2 times a week.



Voice from the Community

"It is hard for rural communities to start, and it's easy to be overwhelmed. A small town might believe they don't have the resources...but in my experience, it's getting the community buy-in and aligning the resources and technical assistance. It takes one facilitator and one convening organization to do that. If you have that with a passionate community, rural or urban, you can get the work done."

—Jennifer Conner, Director of the Healthy Hearts Coalition Program Director.