REACHing Hispanics in New Mexico with Diabetes Education

In the past 15 years, the number of Americans with diagnosed diabetes has more than doubled, reaching 14.6 million in 2005. Diabetes is especially threatening for Hispanics because of its growing prevalence and the high number of risk factors and complications among this population. For example, in Hidalgo and Grant Counties, New Mexico, many Hispanic residents are poor, elderly, and have major health problems. In the area, 1 in 5 people does not have health insurance, and 1 in 11 has diabetes.

CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program funds Hidalgo Medical Services to raise awareness about diabetes and lessen its negative effect on the area's Hispanic residents. CDC funding allows Hidalgo Medical Services to implement the Lifestyles and Values Impact Diabetes Awareness (La Vida) program, which offers diabetes education classes, support groups, community outreach, and grocery store tours that include instructions on how to read food labels. The program includes a physical activity fitness program and trains community lay health workers, called promotoras, to provide personalized support for program participants.

With technical assistance and training support from CDC staff, the organization works with patients to reduce their risk for diabetes complications. One way to determine risk for diabetes complications is by measuring hemoglobin A1c levels; an A1c level of seven or higher increases a person's risk for diabetes complications. At initial involvement in the program, Hidalgo Medical Services' patients had an average hemoglobin A1c level of 8.2. After nine to twelve months of involvement in the program, patients' average hemoglobin A1c levels dropped to 7.6.

Some REACH La Vida Program participants credit the program for providing much-needed access to health care and hope. According to one participant, "The promotora did all the work for me. I didn't know where I was going to get help that I needed. I looked through the phone book myself, [but] if you don't have insurance, you're kind of lost. There was all the help I needed in one little building."

CDC's REACH program supports grantees to partner across different sectors of the community to implement evidence-based interventions that reflect the community's individual culture and local realities. CDC provides financial support, as well as technical assistance, training, and consultation for local program leaders on many topics, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination.

The REACH La Vida Program has been designated a best practice model by the federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). As part of the fiscal year 2007 REACH cooperative agreement program, Hidalgo Medical Services is one of 18 entities selected to become a Center of Excellence in the Elimination of Disparities (CEED). These CEEDs will serve as a regional and national network of resource centers that will disseminate strategies that work in specific ethnic groups. REACH also funds 22 Action Communities that will implement effective public health interventions in their local communities.

For more information about CDC at Work, please contact us at (202) 245-0600 or go to http://www.cdc.gov/washington/.

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