

Addressing Health Equity through the Spectrum of Prevention:

Training for community-based health educators



INTRODUCTION

In Minnesota, health disparities persist amidst complex systems that prevent some Minnesotans from accessing healthy food and opportunities for physical activity. In this context, University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension Health and Nutrition staff—who have traditionally provided direct education for participants with limited financial resources—are called upon to work differently: to work for change within complex systems.

To do so effectively, staff must have both an *understanding of systems* and *skills to practice engagement* within communities. To equip 80+ community-based educators for this challenging work, a UMN Extension Health and Nutrition team developed a months-long, interactive training series to build staff's skills in systems-thinking and community engagement.

METHOD

The "Exploring our Work with the Spectrum of Prevention" training uses the *Spectrum of Prevention* (Prevention Institute) as a guiding framework and *community engagement* as a central principle. The *Spectrum* is a practical tool to problem-solve systemic, public health issues. *Engagement* is an crucial practice to empower communities to participate fully in positive, long-term change.

The training includes five online modules, reflection questions and discussion guides for supervisors, and in-person experiential activities. Evaluation surveys gathered participant feedback; additional evaluations will track how the training influenced the Health and Nutrition programs statewide.

Online Training Series: EXPLORING OUR WORK THROUGH THE SPECTRUM OF PREVENTION

Module 1: Systems Approaches

- Understand how systems impact the ability to make the healthy choice the easy choice
- Begin creating a common language for systems-level approaches to prevention

Module 2: Working Across the Spectrum

- Be able to recognize which level on the spectrum of prevention a given approach represents.
- Be able to identify approaches on each level of the spectrum of prevention for a given situation.

Module 3: Engagement and Partnering

- Differentiate between outreach and community engagement
- Understand the role of community engagement in systems approaches to health
- Practice "turning 'they' into 'we'" by integrating community engagement into personal work plans and practice
- Apply specific community engagement tools in systems approaches to health

Module 4: Assessment

- Describe the purpose and role of assessment in systems approaches to health
- Understand that assessment is an ongoing process that informs all Health and Nutrition work
- Identify ongoing assessment questions and tools

Module 5: Putting it all together

- Reviewing learning objectives from Modules 1-4
- Bringing systems-thinking approaches to community partners
- Toolkits and resources



In-Person Supplemental Training

Supervisor Check-ins

- 1:1 Check-ins
- Large-group regional discussions

Health & Nutrition Conference

- Community Immersion Experience
- Walking Assessments
- Meetings with Community Partners



Photos: During the Community Immersion Experience at the Health and Nutrition Conference, staff took photos to document opportunities for "policy, systems and environmental change" (PSE) approaches in communities across the Twin Cities. Corner markets (above) and community gardens (left) present opportunities for increasing access to healthy food.

Community Engagement

THE SPECTRUM OF PREVENTION

Influencing Policy and Legislation	UMN Extension provides technical assistance to food shelves to create Healthy Food Shelf Policies or Guidelines to encourage healthy changes throughout the food shelf system.
Changing Organizational Practices	Food shelves purchase more healthful foods and change shopping lists to allow for to allow clients to take a greater quantity of fruits and vegetables at each visit. They add signage and other prompts to nudge clients to choose healthier items.
Fostering Coalitions and Networks	Partners such as food shelves, emergency meal programs, Extension and local public health agencies coordinate and collaborate on hunger issues through the Metro Food Access Network Hunger Action Team.
Educating Providers	Food shelf volunteers are trained by UMN Extension to promote healthy items and demonstrate healthy recipes at the food shelf.
Promoting Community Education	Partners create a 'Healthy Food Drive' campaign to encourage community members to donate healthier items to emergency food programs.
Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills	SNAP-Ed Educators and EFNEP Community Nutrition Educators provide direct nutrition education at food shelves using evidence- and practice-based curricula.

Prevention Institute, www.preventioninstitute.org

EVALUATION RESULTS

"I think my work changed because now I understand better the different levels of the spectrum of prevention, and I have the opportunity to develop each level in my different projects."

"[It] caused me to rethink . . . how can I actively engage the participants in the community versus just starting something that I think is the PSE thing to do."

"At the end, participants will be the ones looking for solutions, because they are the ones that know where to start. We are facilitators, bridges to support people's efforts."

AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THIS MODULE, I . . .

