

North Carolina



Faith Communities Inspire Good Health

“Obesity is a problem that requires both personal and community action. People in all communities should be able to make healthy choices. That means creating communities that strongly support healthy eating and active living.”

— Jeff Engle, MD, North Carolina State Health Director

Public Health Problem

Like many of us, Leslie Brim struggled to get enough physical activity most days of the week. Finding the time, the motivation, and a convenient place were difficult and kept her on the couch. She knew the clock was ticking, and the pounds were mounting.

More than six million North Carolinians are overweight or obese and are at higher risk for chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. Paying the medical costs of these conditions has increased the state’s budget by \$2 billion.

These chronic diseases affect African Americans in North Carolina, especially in Wake County, at significantly higher rates than whites. African Americans also are more likely to be obese and less likely to eat healthy foods and exercise on a daily basis, according to data from Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System surveys.

To address these disparities, officials in the Wake County Human Services (WCHS), with support from North Carolina’s Eat Smart, Move More initiative, turned to the faith-based community for help in reaching out to African Americans in the county.

Taking Action

Eat Smart, Move More North Carolina is a statewide movement designed to reverse the upward trend in obesity and chronic disease by helping North Carolinians to make better food choices and be more physically active. With help from CDC’s Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant, WCHS began working with 46 African American churches to create healthier church environments through policy changes.

Studies show that efforts to promote health in faith-based communities reach more people and have great potential to reduce health disparities because of the power of churches to influence the behavior of their members.

WCHS and Wake County churches worked together to

- Promote physical activity and better food choices all year.
- Educate church leaders on how church policies can influence what food is served at churches and encourage healthy eating and physical activity in members trying to achieve a healthy weight.
- Conduct annual health screenings for cholesterol, blood pressure, and body mass index.

Healthy People Objective

Community health promotion programs

PHHS Block Grant Funding

Represents 50%–74% of total program costs



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Taking Action (continued)

- Offer counseling to interpret screening results, discuss options, and provide physician referrals.
- Build and create places where the healthy choice is the easy choice.

Impact

Thanks to the new Family Wellness Center that opened at Pleasant Grove Church in Cary, North Carolina, Leslie Brim and her church friends are changing their lifestyles by devoting more time to healthier activities. The center offers regular fitness activities, counseling, nutrition classes, and special monthly health events.

WCHS has made great strides in promoting healthy behaviors through the Eat Smart, Move More initiative. PHHS Block Grant funds made a difference in Wake County in 2009.

- The Eat Smart, Move More initiative reached more than 20,000 people at 46 faith-based organizations, up from 4,200 persons at 17 churches in 2007.

- One local church built a family wellness center.
- Three area churches installed exercise equipment for regular use by church members.
- Twenty-four faith-based organizations offered regular nutrition and exercise classes.
- All 46 WCHS partners adopted healthy food policies for church-sponsored events.
- All 46 WCHS partners opened community gardens to give members a place to grow their own fruits and vegetables.

WCHS staff members contact partner organizations quarterly to monitor their progress and offer counseling. WCHS plans to continue its work with the faith-based community and reach out to more African American churches in the future.

For more information on the PHHS Block Grant, go to www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant

For more information on Healthy People, go to www.healthypeople.gov



PHHS Block Grant Supports North Carolina's Healthy People Priorities

The PHHS Block Grant provides flexible funding that states can use to prevent and control chronic diseases, respond quickly to outbreaks of infections and waterborne diseases, and address their specific public health needs. States can align their programs with any of the Healthy People objectives.

North Carolina uses its funds to address the following four health objective priorities:

- Community health promotion programs.
- Deaths from unintentional injuries.
- Rape or attempted rape.
- Dental caries experience.

For a complete list of funded health objectives for all grantees, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/phhsblockgrant/statehpprior.htm>