

## **Delaware Division of Public Health Applies the Principles of the National Prevention Strategy to Community-Based Multi-Sector Programming**

*Building faith-based and community relationships to increase opportunities for health promotion.*

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) convened “America’s Plan for Better Health and Wellness,” a learning community with representatives from Hawaii, Mississippi, and Delaware. The learning community supported ongoing work that advances the goals of the National Prevention Strategy (NPS) and provided an opportunity for state information exchange. The goals of the learning community were to: a) Increase the capacity of state and territorial health agencies to advance a multisector state collaborative effort that addresses a health issue, as highlighted by the National Prevention Strategy; b) provide insight and opportunity to address challenges inherent in multisector initiatives; and c) foster peer-to-peer networking and shared-learning opportunities.

In 2013, the Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) began a process to increase access to health services for Delaware residents by maximizing facility use and better-organizing services. By increasing community partnerships, Delaware is working to increase access to health screenings and reduce barriers to community-based clubs that support physical activity and nutrition. These initiatives will help Delaware systematically address the National Prevention Strategy’s [four overarching Strategic Directions](#): Empowered People, Elimination of Health Disparities, Community and Clinical Preventive Services, and Healthy and Safe Community Environments.

Specifically, DPH, in partnership with the [Governor’s Council on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention](#), is engaging in a process of exploring opportunities to use schools and other public settings to promote physical activity in the community. This initiative will focus on the design and implementation of joint use agreements, program development, and outreach to community organizations, including faith-based organizations.

### **Steps Taken**

- DPH worked with the University of Delaware, using geocoding to identify places in the state where there is an intersection of faith-based communities, youth-serving organizations (such as the YMCA), and public facilities such as schools. In Delaware, schools offer the largest municipal space and also have a history of developing formal agreements to share their space with others in the community.
- Using these data and in partnership with the Sussex County Health Promotion Coalition, DPH identified two communities and five faith-based organizations to launch pilot projects in 2014.
- The selected sites will focus on varying opportunities to create awareness of community health-related issues and to provide services, programs, and activities to engage the community. These opportunities will include activity clubs, health education classes, cooking classes, health screenings, and other programs to be identified by the community.
- DPH is starting the effort in Sussex County because of its long history of effective partnerships and health promotion outcomes. DPH and the county will explore how they can make a joint use policy agenda work and serve as a model for Kent and New Castle, the two other counties in

Delaware.

- DPH reached out to various partners across the state, including the six major health systems that were already providing community-based health screenings, such as blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol, and height/weight checks, in collaboration with other state-level initiatives, such as the [Million Hearts Delaware](#) and [Know Your Numbers](#) campaigns.
- DPH also works closely with its sister agencies at the state and local level, including the Department of Education and Delaware Parks & Recreation. In addition, DPH continue to develop its relationships with the Delaware Department of Transportation to help reduce transportation-related access issues.

## Results

Work is ongoing with this initiative but relationships have been re-established and refined between DPH, local schools, faith-based organizations, community-based organization, and youth-serving organizations.

One anticipated impact as a result of the collaborations is greater outreach to vulnerable populations. As evidenced in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation national program, Faith in Action, faith organizations have significant credibility in high-risk communities and can demonstrate greater impact in reaching those who could benefit from health promotion-related activities.

To measure the effectiveness of the collaboration, DPH will collect process evaluation measures to determine the engagement level of partners and monitor activities of schools, the community, and the faith-based community. One of the primary measures will be to observe how the faith-based organizations work in partnership with other organizations, especially the local schools, to implement a community-based initiative that reaches beyond the faith organization's membership. Another measure will assess how joint use policies catalyze community engagement and sustain programming beyond the formal intervention period.

## Lessons Learned

- Building initial relationships with faith-based organizations is a slow process. Generally, most faith organizations have not operated a large-scale, community-focused effort beyond their own building. Most see the opportunity of expanding influence, but most do not understand how they can operate and sustain the program. This is also true for government organizations that have not previously worked with faith-based organizations.
- Working through the Delaware Department of Education's requirements around joint use agreements has been challenging to local organizations. In Delaware, use of space requires that users pay a "use-fee"—usually \$100/hour—for programs, which is hard for cost-constrained organizations. DPH has sought ways to address this challenge, working with districts to mitigate these costs or find ways to cover the costs of preventive screenings under the Affordable Care Act.
- Taking legislation into action can be difficult. For example, Delaware's joint use legislation

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encourages shared use agreements for public facilities, which is a tremendous opportunity to support a wide range of community-focused activities, especially those focused on health. Because this policy requires high levels of cooperation and collaboration especially with local public schools, DPH and the Delaware Department of Education will jointly design a toolkit to provide general guidance on how to put the joint use policy into action. This toolkit will describe ways that schools can best support these efforts and provide space for these activities, as well as address ongoing concerns related to liability.

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