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Supporting Each Other to Prevent Diabetes

On a Monday evening in spring, laughter and engaged conversation warmed a quiet South Side hospital corridor. Inside a nearby classroom, a group of adults supported each other on their efforts to improve their health.

“I lost ten pounds. So I’m proud of myself and I feel good,” Valerie Binford reported one night to the group, who responded with congratulatory shouts. “It’s made a big difference to me, my kids and my family life,” she said.

Another participant reported feeling discouraged about not having lost weight that week. To lift her spirits, the group praised her for attending the session anyway and suggested ways to overcome the barriers she faced.

Welcome to Andrea Hood’s classroom of Making the Connection: Healthy Living Program.

In this workshop, part of a 16-week pilot study, eight women and one man worked together to learn ways to reduce their risk for diabetes.

Making the Connection “healthy living coaches,” such as Ms. Hood, are community members trained to conduct weekly workshops about good food choices, healthy physical fitness habits and the risks for developing diabetes.

“I find the program sparks the participants’ interests to eat healthier and incorporate physical activity into their lives,” Ms. Hood said. “Together they learn how to achieve their weight loss goals and they support each other as a team.”

Improving their families’ health is a strong motivator for many program participants. A member

of Ms. Hood’s group, K. C. Williams, said he is applying what he learns in the program at home and shares his new knowledge with his family. “Anyone coming to the program can benefit,” he said, adding that the program could “change the eating habits for a lot of families.”

Making the Connection, or *¡Conéctate!*, is a research study focused on the prevention of diabetes in African American and Latino communities, who are among populations at high risk for the disease. Its pilot stage just completed, the study includes participants from Chicago Lawn, Gage Park, and West Lawn, where residents have identified diabetes as a primary health concern. One pilot group of residents, met Monday evenings with

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Community Partners Sought to Promote Study, Provide Meeting Space

Making the Connection is seeking churches, businesses, schools and organizations in Chicago Lawn, Gage Park and West Lawn to become partners in our large-scale research study, scheduled for launch in early 2007.

Community partners are needed to provide meeting space in which to hold program sessions, offer time to research staff at meetings or church services for brief recruitment presentations, distribute informational flyers, or donate goods or services.

For more information, call Daisy Cintron, the project coordinator, at (312) 355-1458.



Members of the Making the Connection: Healthy Living Program research team.

Supporting Each Other to Prevent Diabetes



Pilot study participant
K. C. Williams recommends Making the Connection: Health Living Program.

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Ms. Hood while a second group, led by Alejandra Cabrera in Spanish, met Thursday mornings. Both groups met at Holy Cross Hospital at 2701 W. 68th St.

Sandra Chaparro, a member of Ms. Cabrera's group, was motivated to join to improve her health. Speaking after eight weeks in the program, Ms. Chaparro said it influenced her to make healthy changes in her cooking and physical activity.

"My life has changed very much," she said.

Making the Connection's community presence is growing as participants share the program with family and friends.

Maria Dimas, another participant, said so many friends

were interested in her work in the program that she started a walking club, which helps her maintain her commitment to regular physical activity.

"Five friends are in my walking club and we go to the park. The support from other people helps a lot," Ms. Dimas said. She added that she and her husband now go for walks too.

"I share the information with my family and friends who aren't in the program so they can change their lifestyles, too," said Ms. Binford.

She had a simple explanation for the success she found in the pilot study sessions: "I love this class."

As a community-based diabetes research initiative of the Illinois Prevention Research Center, Making the Connec-

tion aims to reach community residents by connecting with community partners.

"The pilot groups have been going very well thanks to a great partnership between the community and the UIC research team," said the project's lead researcher, Laurie Ruggiero, professor of community health sciences. "Community partnerships in Southwest Chicago have built the support needed to run the pilot program," she said.

The program works closely with a community advisory board to develop partnerships with local community organizations, especially the Latino Organization of the Southwest and Holy Cross Hospital, which provided space and support for the pilot groups.

Bears' Owner Leads SHAPE Walk



More than 1,600 adults participated in the SHAPE walk, held at Chicago's Soldier Field on May 31. Leading the seventh annual senior health and fitness walk was Virginia McCaskey, owner of the Chicago Bears, pictured here (center right) with Chelly Bloom, event worker and participant. The event is one of IPRC's activities as part of the Healthy Aging Research Network.

Lifestyle Changes Reduce Diabetes Risk

Can diabetes be prevented in people at high risk for the disease?

Yes, according to a research study published in 2002.

The study, called the Diabetes Prevention Program, found the incidence of diabetes was reduced by 58 percent among overweight, high-risk adults who adopted healthier lifestyles. This method was more effective than using the drug metformin, which reduced the disease by 31 percent.

Participating in the three-year national study were 3,234 overweight adults with impaired glucose tolerance, or "pre-diabetes."

Study participants using the lifestyle-intervention method had to achieve and maintain at

least a 7 percent weight loss through a healthy low-calorie, low-fat diet. They also had to engage in physical activity of moderate intensity, such as brisk walking, for at least 150 minutes per week. To achieve these goals, they worked one-to-one with case managers on a 16-session curriculum to learn about diet, exercise and behavior modification techniques.

The IPRC is adapting this lifestyle-modification curriculum for use in community groups, led by community members, and evaluating its impact in its core research project, Making the Connection: Health Living Program.

Sponsors Wanted for November Wellness Fair

The IPRC is seeking business donations for the seventh annual Community Wellness Fair, which will be held on November 3 at Marquette Park.

Several levels of sponsorship are available, offering a range of incentives to participating businesses.

Since 2000, thousands of community residents have participated in the annual event, receiving health education, chronic disease screenings, immunizations and social services. The free event hosts more than 50 health care providers and exhibitors each year.

"This is a popular event that serves important needs in the community," said Ofelia Sandoval, center coordinator.

The IPRC works closely with the Latino Organization of the Southwest (LOS), our primary community partner, and numerous community leaders and residents on this and other activities to involve and empower families to improve their health.

For more information about sponsoring the wellness fair, contact Ms. Sandoval at (312) 413-3379 or osand@uic.edu.



More than 1,000 people attended the Community Wellness Fair at Marquette Park in November 2005.

Stores Surveyed for Healthy Foods

With the Cancer Education and Career Development Program at the UIC Institute for Health Research and Policy, IPRC is conducting a survey of the availability of healthy food choices in stores in Southwest Chicago.

All types of grocery stores, convenience stores, specialty stores, and liquor stores are being surveyed in five neighborhoods: West Lawn, Chicago Lawn, West Englewood, Englewood, and Ashburn.

A trained observer visits each store twice and documents the availability, selection, quality, and price of a variety of foods, including fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy, and whole grain breads and cereals. The information will be used to gain a better understanding of access to healthy food options in these five communities and to inform ongoing and potential future interventions.

IPRC Activities around the State

The Illinois Prevention Research Center (IPRC) completed a state survey with the **Illinois Department of Public Health's Heart Disease and Stroke Program**. The survey assessed needs and capacity of county health departments providing heart disease and stroke prevention programming. Survey results will allow the state to evaluate urban and rural capacities and provide individual reports to counties about how their programs compare to others in the state. Health departments in all 94 counties in Illinois participated in this Web-based survey, the first of its kind nationwide. IPRC is working with the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** to share this model with other states.

The center is expanding its once urban-focused mission by working in 14 rural communities on prevention-oriented projects on nutrition education, obesity and overweight prevention and screening for oral health cancer. The IPRC role on the projects is primarily evaluation and strategic planning, but the center provides some technical assistance and intervention development to analyze rural and urban geographic disparities. IPRC is conducting this work in collaboration with the **National Center for Rural Health Professions**.

In June 2005, the IPRC completed a six-year contract with the Illinois Department of Public Health to evaluate the state's programming in **arthritis prevention and control**. The center evaluated different county programs and found them effective in reducing the burden of arthritis in counties that had such programs. Although the evaluation is now complete, the partnership between the department and IPRC to promote reducing the burden of arthritis continues, said Karen Peters, assistant professor of health policy and administration, who conducted the evaluation.

A recent publication describes IPRC examination of **oral health care services** in Illinois based on the U.S. Surgeon General's Report in 2000, which called for creating health infrastructure to address oral health needs of all Americans. Researchers found that oral health concerns in Illinois are similar to those in the rest of the nation, and that oral health disparities are a real problem, especially for residents of rural areas. (Baldyga VV, et al. Addressing rural health disparities in Illinois: Oral health. *Public Health Practice in Illinois*. Winter 2006, 6(2), 59-67.)

Beliefs and Practices about Brain Health Examined



Renée Beard is a medical sociologist investigating the social aspects of Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease affects an estimated 4.5 million adults in the United States. In hopes of ultimately finding ways to prevent or delay this debilitating brain disorder, IPRC-affiliated researcher Renée Beard is studying how social factors affect its development.

Dr. Beard is convening six focus groups to discuss memory loss. She is recruiting older adults of various ethnic backgrounds from Chicago area senior centers, Alzheimer's Association support groups and the Northwestern Alzheimer's Disease Center. Each focus group includes six to eight participants. Two groups have Alzheimer's diagnoses, two have mild cognitive impairment (considered to be a potential precursor of the disease), and two have no memory-related conditions.

As a medical sociologist, Dr. Beard is trying to understand the social aspects of the disease, especially health

practices and beliefs regarding the brain. Two main questions in her research are "Do people believe they can play an active role in their own brain health?" and "What, if anything, do people think they can do to improve their brain health?"

Diet, nutrition, physical activity and social involvement have been shown to help maintain brain capacity, preventing future decline. It remains unclear, however, whether diagnosed individuals are aware of such information or performing such health practices.

"In general, there is not enough research done on first-person experiences of memory loss," Dr. Beard said. "To understand that aspect is so important."

Dr. Beard, a post-doctoral fellow in the UIC Gerontological Public Health Training Program, is conducting the one-year research project as

part of the Health Aging Research Network. The network, which includes nine Prevention Research Centers, their partner communities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and national organizations such as the National Council on Aging and the Alzheimer's Association, recently launched the Healthy Brain Initiative, which funds this project. Each site is conducting related research, for a total of more than 300 respondents nationally.

Dr. Beard and her colleagues recently received CDC funding to expand the project to allow the tracking of a group of older adults, their health behaviors and brain health over several years. This component of the study will add 50 to 75 older adults to the current group of participants in the greater Chicago area.

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Our Mission

To reduce disparities in health by studying approaches to promote healthful behaviors and prevent disease across the lifespan; to conduct this research in partnership with communities across Illinois; to share findings and best practices locally and nationally; and to improve the practice of public health through training and education.

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