

ACTIVATE WHITTIER, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

PIH HEALTH AND KAISER PERMANENTE DOWNEY MEDICAL CENTER

BACKGROUND

In 2007, PIH Health and Kaiser Permanente Downey Medical Center conducted community health needs assessments that identified alarmingly high rates of obesity in the community—25.3 percent of children and 27 percent of adults—along with an increase in diabetes prevalence. Whittier, situated in southeast Los Angeles County, has a population of approximately 85,000 people, of whom 66 percent are Latino and 27 percent are low income. In response, these two regional health systems aligned their focus on obesity prevention and began to find ways to coordinate their community benefit work. In 2008, the two hospital systems partnered with the city of Whittier, the YMCA of Greater Whittier and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to establish Activate Whittier. The guiding mission for Activate Whittier is to build a healthy community through engagement, collaborative partnerships and environmental policy changes that focus on sustainable efforts to improve the health and wellness of community residents.

INTERVENTIONS

The strength of Activate Whittier lies in its community-based, collaborative structure. Since its establishment, Activate Whittier has grown into a large and diverse collaborative that includes multiple community-based organizations, as well as schools, residents and youth. By successfully engaging a diverse pool of community stakeholders, Activate Whittier leverages shared resources and a collective set of diverse skills, assets and knowledge that drive positive, sustainable outcomes and keep partners engaged and moving forward.

Community conversations. Initially, the collaborative struggled to find direction and sustain momentum. In 2011, PIH Health brought in a consultant who facilitated strategic community conversations over six months with more than 40 agencies as well as Whittier residents. This process allowed Activate Whittier to collect community input that helped shape the collaborative's mission and overarching goals. This knowledge led to the creation and adoption of an evidence-based and actionable strategic plan.

Infrastructure and funding. A key component to Activate Whittier's success is the YMCA of Greater Whittier. The YMCA's commitment to serve as the backbone organization and to dedicate resources and staff time were instrumental to Activate Whittier receiving more than \$700,000 in grant funding to support its work. The two hospital systems have also contributed significantly, though in different ways. Kaiser Permanente has provided more than \$540,000 in multiyear community benefit grants and board leadership support, while PIH Health has allocated community benefit staff, health educators and technical support staff to help manage many of the ongoing, core operational needs of the program.

Board structure and support. Activate Whittier created a board of directors that includes community leaders. Together, the partners of Activate Whittier have contributed resources and in-kind services that sustain its efforts. Public health agencies provided data analysis support and policy expertise for the collaborative's work to advocate successfully for smoke-free parks.

The city of Whittier has raised awareness for Activate Whittier through its city council, with the cooperation of the city manager and the director of parks and recreation. Most importantly, the local YMCA has led this collaborative as the fiscal agent and committed its own top community health leader as the chair of Activate Whittier since its inception. The ongoing and diverse contributions of community stakeholders account for much of Activate Whittier's success.

Advocacy and training. Activate Whittier promotes environmental and policy changes, with substantial support from resident advocates, to "make the healthy choice the easy choice." Furthermore, the collaborative works to empower residents, including youth, to make better lifestyle choices with Change Starts with Me advocacy training. A Kaiser Permanente licensed clinical social worker from the educational outreach program leads this training. Residents who graduate from this training have become leaders and community advocates who disseminate health knowledge to their peers. These efforts promote a sustainable model of community health improvement.

RESULTS

Activate Whittier uses multiple evidence-based strategies to evaluate and measure its impact on health outcomes. These strategies include:

- » Photovoice projects by local students and residents who create a digital storytelling tool
- » Comprehensive assessments that document policy and environmental changes as a result of Activate Whittier and resident advocacy
- » Survey assessments on the impact of environmental and policy changes related to healthy eating and physical activity in schools

These evaluation strategies have demonstrated that Activate Whittier has made progress toward building a healthier community.

- » By 2013, adult obesity rates decreased from 27 percent to 23.6 percent, and childhood obesity rates decreased from 25.3 percent to 23.4 percent. Though no direct correlation exists between Activate Whittier's work and these decreased rates, the organization believes its work has contributed to these positive community health outcomes.
- » 67 residents have been trained as community advocates through Change Starts with Me, and five of them have become Activate Whittier community health workers (also known as promotoras).
- » Whittier's City Council adopted policies to ensure that all 22 parks in Whittier are smoke-free.
- » Two prominent corner stores are now labeling healthy food options with an Activate Whittier "Healthy Pick" logo as a result of working with trained community advocates.
- » After-school programs, including the YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club, have implemented an evidence-based physical activity curriculum with 800 youth participants.

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