



Hannahville Indian Community Partners with YMCA to Support Employee and Membership Wellness

The Hannahville Indian Community's Community Health Department formed a ground-breaking initiative to increase employee and member access to health and fitness resources and guidance. The Hannahville Indian Community contracted with the local YMCA to bring a personal trainer into the tribal clinic to lead group exercise classes and personal training sessions, offered free to tribal employees and members. The program expanded into a comprehensive Employee Wellness Program offered under a formal partnership between the Hannahville Indian Community and YMCA, in cooperation with the Tribe's insurance carrier, Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Challenge

The Hannahville Indian Community (HIC) reservation is located in a small, rural area. The nearest fitness facility is 20 miles away, and public transportation is not regularly available. HIC Clinic data revealed that almost 75% of patients were overweight or obese, 21% had diabetes, and about 25% had hypertension. Repeated research shows the benefit of regular physical activity; however, with limited access, not many of the community members were getting the activity recommended.

Solution

The first goal was to offer free employee and community member exercise classes and personal training sessions. HIC recruited a personal trainer to work for the Tribe as a consultant, through the YMCA. This personal trainer began leading weekly group exercise classes at the HIC Health Clinic, Hannahville Indian School, and the community center. Personal training was also offered to interested employees and community members.

Tribal employees and community members learned about the exercise classes through posters and emails shared across HIC buildings and community events. The Community Health Department organized wellness challenges for employees and community members, which increased participation in classes and personal training sessions, as well as physical activity across the community. One example of a wellness challenge was called Holiday Trimmings. The Holiday Trimmings program challenged people to either lose or maintain their weight during the holidays with weekly weigh-ins over 9 weeks. The 57 people who completed the challenge lost a total of 115 pounds.



Hannahville Indian Community offered free exercise classes and personal training sessions to community members and employees, organized wellness challenges, and increased the whole community's access to physical activity opportunities through an innovative partnership with the YMCA.

Funding for these activities was made possible by the CDC STEPS grant. This grant was awarded to HIC to promote health and disease prevention. When funding for this grant ended in 2007, HIC received another CDC grant, REACH US, to work on promoting healthy behaviors. Throughout the following years, supplemental funding for fitness equipment and events has been available through various grants, including the Special Diabetes Program for Indians and Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

Sustainability

In 2008, HIC used the REACH US funding to hire a community member as a Community Outreach Worker and purchase exercise equipment for an employee and community gym. The Community Outreach Worker was able to work one-on-one with community members on the reservation to support increased physical activity and other health behavior improvement. While working for HIC, the Community Outreach Worker pursued classes at the local YMCA and became certified as a personal trainer. This allowed HIC to provide their community with a personal trainer in-house with sustainable, on-going funding under the Indian Health Service budget. HIC located the exercise clinic in a spare office in the tribal vocational rehabilitation building, which became an interim employee gym. In 2010, HIC renovated the Health Center and created a large room for a fitness center, which is used by employees and community members. While HIC set out to increase physical activity and well-being one community member at a time, they created strong partnerships and laid the foundation for a sustainable program.



The program is now incorporated into the Tribe's insurance benefit structure; those who choose to participate receive a lower deductible health insurance.

Continued Growth

In 2010, the HIC administration formed a multi-disciplinary wellness council in order to form a comprehensive employee wellness program. HIC pursued the program as a proactive way to support employee health, chronic disease prevention, and as means for cost savings in medical expenses. Utilizing the existing partnership with the YMCA, HIC worked with the YMCA to run the program. The Tribe's insurance carrier, Blue Cross Blue Shield, supported the pursuit of the Employee Wellness Program by enhancing programming with their online health education and support. Now, the YMCA runs the Employee Wellness Program in partnership with the Hannahville Indian Community. The program is incorporated in the insurance benefit structure, and those who chose to participate receive a lower deductible health insurance. While operating the program, it was found that there was a need for increased access to fitness facilities, and so another facility was built. Currently, employees and community members can use the fitness center at the tribe's casino, which is open 24 hours a day and staffed by a YMCA trainer.

If you would like to hear more information about the process that Hannahville Indian Community used to create, support, grow, and sustain their Community and Employee Wellness Program, contact Erin Davis at erin.davis@hichealth.org