

Sitka Health Summit Unites Community Members and Health Policies

Martha Pearson

Summary

The main activity of the Sitka Health Summit is Planning Day, an annual meeting that engages community members to take an active role in identifying, prioritizing, and implementing Citizen Health Initiatives. With additional support and policy related guidance specifically from the SEARHC Community Transformation Grant, the Sitka Health Summit created grassroots initiatives that empower community members to make systemic changes to improve community health policy. The supported initiatives live on today, as does the Planning Day process.

Challenge

High fuel prices, scarcity of developable land, and the remote nature of Sitka, Alaska create an environment where community members experience a high cost of living and financial barriers to health. These dynamics reduce the resources that community members can spend on healthcare, nutritious foods, and wellness activities. In addition, findings in the 2014 Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicators Report found that food costs in Sitka are 35.1% higher than the national average and there is an increasing usage of federal and local food assistance programs by community members. Compounded with the financial barriers to health are the rising chronic disease rates in Sitka. According to the Alaska's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Data, years 1991 to 2012 show increasing rates of chronic disease risk factors such as obesity, high blood pressure and physical inactivity.

Solution

The Sitka Health Summit was founded by health professionals and concerned community members to implement systemic changes to increase the impact of primary prevention. It is a collaborative process between health professionals and community members. At each yearly summit, individuals from various sectors select key community health initiatives that are given seed money and implemented by diverse workgroups. In 2011, The SEARHC Community Transformation Grant strengthened the environmental and policy focus of the Summit by providing training to members, guidance on the planning day and meeting support. These steps ensure that sustainable, evidence based projects were chosen and implemented.



Your Involvement is Key

The Sitka Health Summit is an empowering and engaging way for community members to promote health and wellness in Sitka. Attend a MAPP meeting or the Sitka Health Summit, learn about past and present initiatives, and visit <http://www.sitkahealthsummitak.org> to see how you can contribute to a healthier Sitka.

Results

With support from the SEARHC Community Transformation Grant, the Sitka Health Summit has created Citizen Health Initiatives that last. The most successful include the award winning Fish-to-Schools Program, the Sitka Farmer's Market, the Choose Respect Mural project, the Hames Wellness and Fitness Center, Revitalize Sitka and the Downtown Revitalization Project, and becoming the first nationally-recognized Walk- and Bike-Friendly community in Alaska. Recently, we celebrated the opening of the Community Kitchen project which gives all citizens a safe place to learn about, create and preserve healthy food. The creation and implementation of these initiatives has contributed to Sitka's 2014 2nd place ranking in the state for overall health by the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps

Contact

Martha Pearson

SEARHC
222 Tongass Dr.
Sitka, AK 99835
907-966-8783 phone
<http://www.searhc.org>

"The Sitka health Summit is one of the best organized, best facilitated grassroots endeavors I have had the privilege to participate in. The impact on Sitka is real and huge." –Alaska State Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins"

- Jonathan Kreiss Tomkins

Sustainable Success

Sitkans continue to be engaged in the annual Sitka Health Summit throughout the year by organizing and supporting initiatives. The legacy of the SEARHC CT Grant is strong. In May, 2014 the Sitka Health Summit hired its first executive director to provide leadership and support to the process. The Katlian Street initiative chosen in 2014 will revitalize a historic area of the town and make it more walkable. In addition to this initiative, the community is preparing for the 2015 summit by participating in a process called Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP). Through the MAPP process, community members will identify significant health issues, create goals and strategies, and plan to take action by the 2015 summit.