

**Mid-Columbia Health Equity Advocates Final Report**  
*Hood River County and The Dalles*  
*Health Promotion Services/, Nuestra Comunidad Sana a program of The Next Door*



## *Table of Contents*

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Overall Grant Activities and Processes.....	10
Achievements.....	14
Challenges.....	20
Lessons Learned.....	21
Next Steps.....	22
Recommendations to other RHECs.....	22
Programmatic Recommendations to OHA.....	23



## *Executive Summary*

In this report you will find a brief introduction, grant activities, processes, achievements, challenges, lessons learned, next steps, recommendations to others RHECs, and programmatic recommendations to OHA.

Mid-Columbia Health Equity Advocates (MCHEA) serves the Mid-Columbia Gorge region specifically Hood River County (Hood River City, Odell, and Parkdale) and the city of The Dalles in Wasco County. Our priority population is Latinos with an additional support for the Native American and Alaska Native population located in tribes along the Columbia River Gorge. According to Census data in 2014 Hood River County's population was approximately 30.9% Latino/Hispanic and the city of The Dalles reported 17% of its population being Latino/Hispanic in 2010. Although US Census is widely used and accepted for demographic data, it has been reported by regional outreach workers and service providers that there are many more Latinos than what the Census estimates or reports. The Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker 2013 Enumeration Profile Study by Alice C. Larson, PhD, confirms this by reporting that approximately 23,200 Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers and their family members that migrate, live and work in the Mid-Columbia Gorge region. In We know that both of these numbers are actually higher than what is being reported, there are many factors as to why Latino individuals may not fill out Census data, also in 2010 Hood River County Community Health Workers did a lot of outreach to Latino families to get the Census filled out, which is why The Dalles numbers are lower. The American Indian and Alaska Native numbers for Hood River County in 2014 was 1.1% of the population. The City of The Dalles collected data in 2010 and accounted for 1.5% of the population. Although the population percentages are low, the disparities American Indians in the Mid-Columbia Gorge region face are staggering. Food, appropriate shelter, transportation and other basic needs are scarce, specifically in the "in-lieu" sites (These sites were set aside by Congress to provide fishing locations to Indian fishers whose traditional fishing grounds were inundated behind dams.) Although the purpose of the "in-lieu" sites is to serve American Indians for fishing seasons (over 1,000 Native Americans per season), many families and individuals live there year round (600 Native Americans)

MCHEA has had many successes, some of the most notable have been the increase of Latinos in leadership positions in the gorge, capacitation for over 80 trained Community Health Workers and Plain Language Workshops provided to community partners. MCHEA is widely known for the Latino leaders that can advise and provide solutions for many organizations in the Columbia Gorge region which ultimately help everyone in the gorge. Because MCHEA staff has been working in the community addressing many social determinants of health our workload and staff capacity is very limited, we have had some challenges with trying to connect all the pieces of the work and look forward to hiring more staff in the future. We have learned a lot in the last 3 years and MCHEA is looking forward to learning more about how to work with tribes in our area and hopefully we can identify a leader that we can work with because we recognize that everyone needs a lead in their communities that is from their community.

*US Census. American Community Survey, 2010 and 2014 estimates.*



## ***Introduction***

Since it was created in 1988, Nuestra Comunidad Sana, a program of The Next Door, has addressed health disparities and promoted health equity. NCS was formed (then known as El Niño Sano) because there was an unmet health need among Latino community members. In the Mid-Columbia Gorge region an entire population was not able to receive the health care it needed. At first, NCS specifically provided services to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) that were new mothers and their infants. Sadly, as the community grew, so did the needs of the vulnerable and isolated, most being Latino and MSFW. NCS became responsive to the needs by asking, listening and working with the community it served. It created one of the nation's first "Promotores de Salud" program. It adopted the use of Popular Education methodology. As services were provided, program participants were empowered to advocate for their health and their needs. Working with data compiled by local, state and national surveys, NCS developed health promotion and educational programs for MSFW and then later for the "settled out" seasonal farmworkers and hospitality workers. As of 2016, NCS has reached out to thousands of Latinos. Program participants and general Latino community members are informed and empowered to make changes on a personal, local and national level. From diabetes, breast cancer, housing, employment and everything "in-between". For over a quarter of a century, NCS has given area Latinos the support needed to address the barriers faced when striving for optimal health. NCS has assisted with what is now known as "social determinants of health" - from providing assistance to accessing affordable housing, accessing healthy food to filling out forms to access quality healthcare. From 2006-2012, with financial support from private foundations and state funding, NCS was able to work alongside Mid-Columbia Gorge Latinos in finding their voices and be heard as advocates for improved health at a policy level. The project was first called La Voz Latina/The Latino Voice, and later changed to Nuestra Voz, Nuestra Salud/Our Voice, Our Health.

A needs assessment specifically focusing on the Latino community that was completed in 2007 identified obesity/diabetes as the most pressing health issue and Latino community members decided to advocate for culturally appropriate physical activity and healthy eating policies. Successes included: 1) inclusion of Latinos in park design, park construction and ownership of a new park within the Hood River Valley Parks and Recreation District as well as significant Latino input to the District's 10 Year Plan, 2) increased Latino participation in the Healthy Active Hood River County (HAHRC) coalition, which worked directly with School District personnel to address school wellness policies. For the first time wellness policies were translated into Spanish as well as received input from Latino parents. 3) This led to the resurrection of the School Health Action Council (SHAC) which welcomes Latino community member input to examine school policies that will lead to improved school nutrition and increase physical activity, 4) production and dissemination of wellness policies to agencies, businesses and the school district, 5) a fostering of Latino leadership to address social determinants of health by connecting Latinos to advisory and decision making bodies, such as the Community Advisory Council of the local Coordinated Care Organization to ensure that the needs of Latinos on the



Oregon Health Plan are addressed and met, and 6) teaching Latinos how to advocate for bills before the Oregon Legislature. NCS brought together Latino community members to advocate for change within their areas of influence (starting walking groups at work, asking a Mobile Health Unit to go to schools, creation of a greenhouse).

Mid-Columbia Health Equity Advocates was officially formed in 2010 as a result of many years of working to assess, build capacity, strategically plan and implement culturally appropriate services while addressing population level changes specifically related to the health disparities that Mid-Columbia Gorge Latino's face. Funding from the State of Oregon and private foundations provided opportunities to capture Mid-Columbia Latino Gorge members input on cultural competency issues through listening sessions and build the capacity of grass root members to advocate for local and state health equity related initiatives/bills. In the initial stages, it was MCHEA's focus to build capacity among Mid-Columbia Gorge Latinos and ensure inclusion of the Latino voice in its work, as well as participation from, and appropriate communication with, Spanish speaking Latinos.

As the staffing agency of MCHEA, NCS has collaborated with numerous community partners to positively impact thousands of Latinos through the implementation of hundreds of direct service programs utilizing CHWs. After 28 years, NCS is widely recognized that for any health related program to be successful in reaching out to Latinos in Hood River and Wasco Counties, CHWs are absolutely necessary.

Once awarded the Regional Health Equity Coalition grant, additional recruitment for this coalition started in March of 2014. The population focus was Latinos in Hood River County and Wasco County and to also offer support for the Mid-Columbia Gorge tribes. Before recruitment MCHEA staff analyzed regional health data from 4 separate sources (CCO Cultural Competency Report, REACH Assessment, Regional Health Needs Assessment of the Columbia Gorge Health Council, CHANGE report/recommendations and local Latino health related data collected through surveys implemented by NCS). The analysis results indicated the following barriers to achieve optimal health for Latinos of the Mid-Columbia Gorge region:

1. lack of affordable housing and transportation (tied for #1)
2. limited access to affordable high quality and culturally appropriate healthcare,
3. poverty – not enough income,
4. limited or little access to healthy and affordable food,
5. lack of affordable activities that promote physical fitness.

Nuestra Comunidad Sana staff met and strategized on recruitment ideas to strengthen and formalize the Mid-Columbia Health Equity Coalition. Print and voice venues were used to disseminate information about MCHEA. In addition to print and radio PSAs, Community Health Workers went out to packing houses to recruit and talk to farmworkers about the coalition purpose and activities. An additional 50 Latino community members showed interest in participating in MCHEA. A "kick-off" event was created and invitations and announcements were sent out. At the MCHEA kick-off meeting, using popular education methodology, equity,



health equity, the coalition purpose and goals were discussed. Then, based on local data and information, the barriers to optimal health were presented to the group. Participants then voted using “dot stickers” on the top five needs that MCHEA should address. The voting resulted in MCHEA agreeing to promote health equity and address disparities by addressing the following issues: lack of affordable housing; lack of transportation; little to no access to physical activities; lack of access to healthy affordable food and education. Meeting days and times were set up with the group. For the next two months, MCHEA continued to meet and discuss the different priority issues. At each meeting there was also discussion as well as participation from community partners. As collaborative partners and liaisons of MCHEA, participation of these health and social determinants of health service providers was and is absolutely necessary to help eliminate barriers and create, change or implement policies that promote health equity. MCHEA’s decision making process is a simple majority rules; those present at the meeting have one vote per member. Although staff members help to prepare and facilitate meetings, MCHEA volunteer coalition members shape the agenda, help run the meetings and decide what issues will be addressed in the meetings.

After a few months of meetings it became apparent that it was extremely difficult for MCHEA members from both The Dalles and Hood River to meet. A 30 minute distance (between HR and The Dalles) impacted meeting times and usually excluded a good portion of members’ attendance. (The meetings would alternate from The Dalles and Hood River County). The issue was brought up to the group, discussed and it was unanimously decided that it would be best to have two MCHEA member groups: one in The Dalles and one in Hood River. With groups being able to now focus on their geographical areas, the barriers to optimal health became area specific. This has created a very dynamic group of individuals that could attend regularly to their meetings; share their experiences and expertise as related to the barriers to optimal health. By listening to coalition members, instead of continuing to have one large formal coalition that had various people “hit and miss” meetings; MCHEA now consists of what can be described as four different groups. And although separate, individuals and groups are very supportive of their other MCHEA coalition members. The Venn-diagram below demonstrates the different groups:

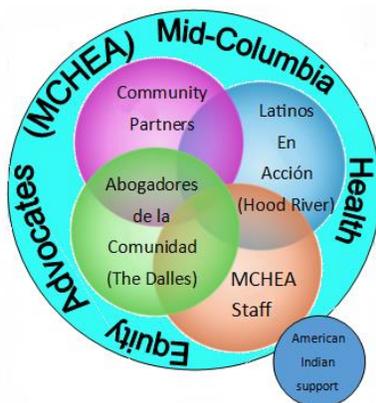


Figure 1. Venn-Diagram created by Bianca Fernandez



Mid-Columbia Health Equity Advocates (MCHEA) membership is composed of a various groups (Refer to figure 1):

- MCHEA staff members- 100% Latino, bilingual and bicultural staff members;
- Area community partners (Latino and mainstream population decision makers, stakeholders and representatives from social determinants of health and health related providers such as housing, food access, education, transportation, county, public health, drug and tobacco prevention, etc.);
- Abogados de la Comunidad (Advocates of the Community) primarily Latinos from The Dalles
- Latinos en Acción (Latinos in Action) primarily Latinos from Hood River County
- River People (Native Americans)– although not an official group of MCHEA, the staff and coalition members support and collaborate to promote health equity and address health disparities specific to this group

Mid-Columbia Health Equity Advocates is a community driven coalition: staff asks, listens and supports the Latino community group members. MCHEA staff members meet weekly. The MCHEA volunteers involved in the 3 other groups and staff members meet once a month and each of the other groups meet monthly. Each group contributes to their respective agendas and keeps volunteers and informed of desired meeting topics and activities they have accomplished and want to pursue.

**MCHEA Staff** consists of The Next Door employees paid through the RHEC grant to assess, build capacity, plan, implement and evaluate coalition activities as designated by coalition membership. MCHEA staff also meets grant requirements and serves as a bridge between coalition members and the community at large. The **Community Partners** group is the group composed of various organization representatives and providers interested in increasing health equity for the Latino/Hispanic population in Hood River and Wasco County. Although some are purposefully selected to participate in the coalition, most are self-selected representatives that want to improve the communities they serve and make life healthier for everyone. Community Partners are usually paid through their work to attend and participate in MCHEA meetings.

**Abogados de la Comunidad (Advocates of the Community)** is the community group from The Dalles. Members are Latino community members that help guide health equity work specifically related to The Dalles area. **Latinos en Acción (Latinos in Action)** is the community group from Hood River County. Members that helps guide the health equity related work in Hood River County.

What has been really exciting has been working with The River People Multidisciplinary Team – (MDT). MDI is meeting separately and no longer officially part of MCHEA but will continue to have as much support from MCHEA staff and community partners as possible. MCHEA staff, Community Partners and the Regional Health Equity Coalition Let’s Talk Diversity helped convene Native American leader in the gorge to meet and address needs for Mid-Columbia Gorge Native American populations in 2014. The MDT existed before MCHEA staff became



involved with them, but the exchanges between both coalitions has been rich and supportive. It has been educational and enlightening to learn of the struggles that the Native American people have endured. It is a privilege to know people that have persevered and shown great resiliency in the face of such struggle. They continue to want to improve their community, their health. It has been a great example of endurance. The current MDT team has been meeting bi-monthly with community representatives from all over the region including people from across the river in Washington State. The MDT team is seeking funding to become their own RHEC with the pro-bono help of one of MCHEA's respected Community Partners, Maija Yasui.

The responsibilities of *Latinos en Acción & Abogados de la Comunidad* include attending at least 9 meetings a year to discuss, deliberate, select activities, share experiences and stories related to health equity and disparities within their identified priority areas. These groups are the driving force behind what MCHEA accomplishes every year, the members of these two groups are the steering committee that decides how MCHEA prioritizes its work. These Latino members are self-selected members of Mid-Columbia Gorge community. Coalition members from these groups that are able to attend the meetings receive a token of appreciation in the form of a gift card, often used for gas or food; are provided dinner and childcare at each meeting.

Community Partners responsibilities include but are not limited to: attending monthly meetings; sharing information from the organization they represent; providing data related to health equity and Mid-Columbia Gorge Latinos; sharing/opening up trainings (when possible) with other coalition members; support and provide venues for coalition activities; review their own organizational policies and practices as related to equity; receive equity training (such as use of Equity Lens Tool); learn about social determinants of health; and work alongside coalition members and staff to further promote health equity and address health disparities. (Member organizations) are listed below:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. HAVEN – DV Services                        | 10. Oregon Department of Human Services |
| 2. Hood River Prevention Office               | 11. Hood River Health Department,       |
| 3. OSU Extension Office                       | 12. Oregon Child Development Coalition  |
| 4. Mid-Columbia Children's Council            | 13. Hood River Providence Hospital      |
| 5. GOBHI                                      | 14. Nuestra Comunidad Sana              |
| 6. North Central Public Health District       | 15. North Wasco School District 21      |
| 7. Mid-Columbia Economic Development District | 16. Building Community Connections      |
| 8. Mid-Columbia Housing Authority             |   |
| 9. Gorge Grown                                |   |

The first year of the RHEC grant for MCHEA was focused on capacity building for both for staff and coalition members. MCHEA staff members attended the Community Health Worker



Training in August of 2014. This training helped equip staff with a deeper understanding of the Community Health Worker role through shared language and community building. The Community Health Worker Training also gave everyone a basic understanding of different health topics including, chronic diseases, mental health, and social determinants of health. In the same first year, MCHEA also focused on health equity. Although NCS had been addressing health equity for over 28 years, what was the latest “interpretation” and what did it actually mean to MCHEA coalition staff and members. . There were many “visioning” meetings regarding equity. What would the Mid-Columbia Gorge “look” like when equity was in place – when all residents had no barriers to achieving optimal health? There was discussion about what policies would need to be in place to purposefully include and address the needs of communities of color, specifically for the Latinos of the region. Time was spent on the reason to promote health equity for Latinos and supporting Native Americans. The first year wrapped up with time spent on learning about roles and responsibilities as related to the goal of MCHEA (promote health equity) for each coalition members.

The second year of the RHEC grant, the groups had become clear and defined. MCHEA members had a better understanding of what MCHEA was, the need to have MCHEA and the role it plays in the respective communities. MCHEA also identified the priorities for each group. *Abogadores de la Comunidad* identified the top needs in The Dalles:

1. Education (including Cultural Competency)
2. Transportation
3. Access to Healthy Foods

*Latinos en Acción* identified the top needs in Hood River County:

1. Housing
2. Transportation
3. Access to healthy foods
4. free or reduced physical activities

After each group identified their communities top needs, monthly meetings were held to plan activities to address these issues. MCHEA staff always checked-in with the leader groups to help facilitate future meetings. The Coalition’s meeting agendas are drafted by Latino Coalition member input. The *Latinos en Acción* group has a president, vice-president and secretary. The president runs the meetings as available. All MCHEA members have had different opportunities within the grant years to participate in trainings and learn about racial equity to better understand how to improve health equity in our community using targeted approaches. Many members have gone through many related trainings (See section on grant activities)

Now in the third year of the formalized MCHEA coalition, the groups are more visible and recognized by the Community Partners as well as the general health and social service providers of the Mid-Columbia Gorge region. MCHEA staff and coalition members are sought out for vetting of various equity related trainings, for ways to approach and include Latinos, for



translations, plain language adaptations and more. Third year the coalition is more visible, community partners look to our staff MCHEA is not a direct service coalition but has been offering plain language workshops for the community. Plain language is writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. Plain language strives to be easy to read, understand, and use. It avoids verbose, convoluted language and jargon. The workshops give organizations training on ensuring that the information that goes out to their participants is something that is helpful and can be read. This is a practice that can be sustained within each of the participating organizations. Due to the MCHEA's visibility and understanding of the role it plays in the community, staff has received many training requests for plain language and equity trainings. MCHEA hopes to continue to offer the plain language workshop and expand training opportunities and staff to support the many request and demands. *Abogadores de la Comunidad* and *Latinos en Accion* have also asked for more leadership trainings this third year. After many events, meetings and trainings coalition members have learned that an important piece of policy change and equity in representation of Latino members is to be a part of decision making groups. Coalition members are specifically seeking to learn how boards, committees and other groups function so that they can be a part of those groups and influence change.

### ***Overall grant activities/processes***

The recruitment process for MCHEA started in March of 2014. MCHEA staff members gathered to talk about recruitment strategies and focus on recruiting Latinos. Discussion about learning ways to support American Indians in the gorge also occurred. After a couple of meetings it was decided to invite people via fliers, radio, packing houses and at Mexican store fronts with fliers. The fliers included the following information: information about commitment (9-11 meetings a year), incentive for every meeting attended

(\$15 gift card for food/gas), Dinner and childcare and the hook was 'come be a part of a group that wants to make their community a better place', whatever that meant to people was later discussed at our first kick-off meeting. Four of MCHEA staff posted fliers throughout the community in local Mexican stores, the federally qualified health clinics, store information boards, etc. packing houses were visited to talk to people during lunch time, and people were also invited through the local radio station, Radio Tierra. The conversations on the radio were about social determinants of health, what it meant and explanations about health not always



Picture: Latino Leader Group, Latinos en Accion



being necessarily tied to health insurance and healthy eating. The message to the public was to be a part of a group to make the community a healthier place. This message was heard loud and clear – a huge response with over 50 adults attending the first meeting and many children. Unfortunately due to funding limitations only 25 were able to be invited to participate – that was the limit of people that could receive a stipend. Because of the massive response, the selection process was really difficult for staff. So many showed great interest –but due to the stipend, it was not fair to offer some a stipend and not others, thus limiting it to 25 participants. After explaining the membership commitments and what people would receive for participating, the formalized MCHEA group was formed. Because the monthly meetings were alternating between The Dalles and Hood River in an effort to be fair, some members were missing out every month. Members from Hood River were having a hard time making the meetings in The Dalles after work and vice-versa. Additionally many people did not have either a license or were afraid to take the freeway that connects both cities. After asking the coalition members how they would like to resolve this issue, the change was proposed and adopted. Instead of one big group spreading itself out, it was proposed for two groups to be formed and serve as more focused to meet the needs by geographic focus. Although not optimal for staff since now it needed to triple its efforts, it made staff member realize they had “set the stage” correctly. The members were empowered. There was no doubt that this was the members’ coalition. After creating the groups, staff members learned more about each community. That although the priorities for coalition members were the same: housing, transportation, access to healthy food, access to free or reduced physical activities, and adequate education; they significantly looked “different” in each of the communities.

Since then the coalition has been functioning in a unique way, refer to figure 1. There are 3 different working groups and each group is reported about what the others are doing. The two main groups from Hood River and The Dalles serve as the steering committee they inform MCHEA staff and the Community Partners on how to move towards equity in the region. Latino leaders that are a part of our group have been very engaged, this is because trusted Community Health Workers invited at the packing houses, radio and local stores. From the beginning, the coalition members were obviously empowered. From how they wanted to meet, where they wanted to meet and what they wanted to meet about. The solutions that they have provided have worked. Why? They were asked to come up with a solution and coalition staff implemented methods that were empowering. Also, coalition staff honored the members’ time by providing dinner, stipends, and childcare. This was a sign of acknowledging that their input was valued and a way to respect people’s commitment after hours when most participants get off work. Coalition members shape the agendas and lead the work which is also something that keeps them engaged. Another method MCHEA Staff use to keep community members meaningfully engaged is using Popular Education methodology. Popular Education methodology is a teaching methodology rooted in social justice that is opposite of what a lecture looks like, games, videos, role plays, ice breakers, and different methods are used to teach. Popular Education is a methodology that allows for everyone to participate and share, so there is no one teacher in the room but rather everyone learns from each other and each person has something to teach and



learn. MCHEA staff use Popular Education because MCHEA members have different education levels in our Latino groups, there are different literacy levels and some people that can't read. Popular Education offers a space where everyone regardless of their educational background can participate and learn.

In 2014, MCHEA staff and The Next Door's Executive Director, Janet Hamada, met with the local Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) now known as Columbia Gorge Health Council (CGHC). The intent of the meetings was to partner with CGHC and the role of CCOs in promoting health equity, specifically for the communities of color. Somehow the message was not getting across. Thankfully, Carol Cheney from OEI staff to explain the importance of a focused approach for our coalition, and how focusing on a specific population lifts the whole community up not just that group. After that and an additional three meetings, the CGHC leaders invited the MCHEA coalition coordinator to participate as an extended member of the Community Advisory Council (CAC) that helps inform PacificSource the local CCO and the governing board of the CGHC. MCHEA now gives a report of the coalition activities to the CGHC. MCHEA staff also attend CAC meetings to ensure input regarding promoting equity for Latinos is addressed. In 2015, MCHEA staff, Leticia Valle became a board member of the governing board for The Gorge's regional CCO, The Columbia Gorge Health Council. Leticia has been a Latina liaison for MCHEA work and is being very intentional about her role with the CCO. The director of the CCO, Kristin Dillon, MD has met with MCHEA staff on multiple occasions and understands MCHEA's work. She looks to our coalition for guidance when needed, especially anything related to equity in the region and or implementing new programs.

Capacity building has taken a main focus in year two and now year three. Once the coalition was formalized, roles were understood and the purpose of the coalition was widely understood by collaborating partners and organizations, MCHEA staff needed to ensure that coalition's members were set up for success. Because of the coalition being mainly coming from Mexico and not familiar with the process of making of laws or policies, MCHEA staff made an effort to have the process explained. A series of trainings called Policy 101 was provided by collaborating partner, Oregon Latino Health Coalition. Much was learned by staff and coalition members on the makings of laws, policies and enforcement. As comfort levels increased around laws and lawmaking – MCHEA staff was able to establish a close working relationship with Hood River Mayor Paul Blackburn. Mayor Blackburn established the Mayor's Latino Advisory Council, the only one in the state (and apparently he is the only Mayor in the state of Oregon that is bilingual in Spanish!) MCHEA staff participate in this group and have helped recruit coalition members from the *Latinos en Acción* MCHEA members. Mayor Blackburn has also been a key supporter to increase the opportunities that MCHEA coalition members have to speak to other law makers. He set up a meeting with Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley. This meeting was to specifically hear and ask Mid-Columbia Latinos of their needs and concerns and a wonderful opportunity to “shine the light” on MCHEA coalition members. These opportunities are not just “token” activities. They impact those in attendance. In the process of providing trainings and these types of experiences to MCHEA coalition members, one coalition member was inspired



and ran for City Council. Although she did not get elected to the position, she reported that she learned a lot and has talked to many other Latinos in the region about her experience. This member ended up joining the City Planning Commission. MCHEA staff has offered and promoted various capacity building opportunities for coalition members. Below is a list of trainings MCHEA members have collectively attended. Next to the name of the training is the numbers of people involved in our coalition that have been trained (trainings in bold were ones MCHEA staff facilitated or hosted for our region):

- **Acoso Escolar ( Bullying Prevention Workshop in Spanish): 10**
- CADCA Academy: 4 members
- CADCA Leadership:5 members
- CADCA Mid-Year: 4 members
- Coalition Core Essentials Course: 1 member
- **Community Health Worker Capacitation: 11**
- Community Health Worker Supervisor Training: 3 members
- **Conflict Resolution w/Dennis Morrow: 3 members**
- Columbia Gorge PaCE Symposium: 2 members
- Collaboration to Advance Community Health: 1 member
- Certified Prevention Specialist Training: 4 members
- Critical Skills for First Time Managers and Supervisors: 2 members
- DELTA Training: 2 members
- Diabetes Prevention Program: 1 member
- Governing for Racial Equity Conference: 2 members
- Ethics in Prevention: 2 members
- Health Literacy Conference: 5 members
- Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention Cultural Competency MCHEA : 4 members
- **Homeownership Housing class ( Spanish ) : 25 members**
- Latino Health Equity Conference 2014, 2015,2016: 8
- Let's Talk Diversity Training: 9 members
- Migrant Western Forum 2014, 2015, 2016 : 9 members
- Motivational Interviewing Training: 10 members
- National Prevention Network Conference: 1 member
- **Nancy Luna Jimenez Transformational Leadership Training: 10 members**
- ORCHWA Conference 2014, 2015, 2016 : 15 members
- Oregon Latino Health Coalition Advocacy Day 2015: 1 member
- Oregon's Coordinated Care Model: Inspiring Health Systems Innovation: 3 members
- Prevention Summits Spring/Fall: 5 members
- **Promoting Health Equity through programs and Policies w/ Ben Duncan (Webinar): 11 members**



- **Policy 101 ( 3 sessions) : 25 members**
- Place Matters Conference, 2014, 2015, October 2016 : 7 members
- **Plain Language Materials Workshop: 16 members**
- ROP: Rural Caucus and Strategy Meeting: 2 members
- Sanctuary Model: 5 members
- SNAP Outreach Regional Training, 2015: 3 members
- Systems Change for Health/ DHPE: 3 members
- Trauma and Resiliency: 2 members
- Trauma-informed Yoga: 2 members

### *Achievements*

- Due to *Abogados de la Comunidad's* involvement with the North Wasco School District, there is now a process in place for Latino community residents to give input regarding their children's educational needs.
- MCHEA staff was asked to recommend a CHW from ORCHWA to be a representative to serve on Region X Health Equity Council of the National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities group on a national level.
- *Abogados de la Comunidad* in The Dalles has made tremendous strides to involving others in their community activities. They created a survey for Latino parents and analyzed the gathered data to further inform their district superintendent about the educational and health concerns Latino families have.
- Changed policy on Providence Hospital's High School Scholarship application. Received commitment of increased scholarships to The Dalles area high school students (there is a greater need for student achievement in this region) The requirements to qualify for the scholarship were changed by taking away the documentation status requirement, lowering the GPA requirement to 2.75, adding free or reduced lunch requirement and requirement of 3 years of Spanish.
- Members of MCHEA serve on **14 different leadership capacities** throughout the region: Hood River Public Transportation Board, Mid-Columbia Community Action Council Board, Hood River Planning Commission Committee, Mid-Columbia Council of Governments Board, *Familias en Accion*, Providence Hood River Board, One Community Health Board, Building Community Connections Co-Chair, Odell Hispanic Coalition Co-Chair, Planned Parenthood Board Member, Advocates of Oregon, Columbia Gorge Health Council, Radio Tierra DJ Hosts, Mayor's Latino Advisory Council, Region X Health Equity Council of the National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities and others.
- MCHEA Staff has been involved in Oregon Blue Zones Project Meetings contributing what Latino members have said they would like to see and ensuring that the Latino voice is not lost in this project. MCHEA staff also did some edits on the Blue Zones website,



MCHEA reviewed for health literacy and made cultural adaptations (For example recommended switching the picture of the Anglo family on expensive bikes, to something more “diverse-income” friendly).

- MCHEA staff members helped edit the region’s needs assessment for Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital and did a plain language adaptation that was used for all Oregon Providence facilities.
- MCHEA staff members provided a plain language trainings to community partners on how to simplify and plain language print materials (12 different agencies in the Gorge and beyond attended).
- MCHEA hosted a listening session with OHSU, OHSU learned a lot from the session and emailed us back that MCHEA coalition really influenced the way they provide services and led them to develop more training to better serve Oregonians in the realm of disabilities.
- MCHEA Staff members influenced interview questions for new CEO hire for the local hospital to include “what is your commitment to serving diverse communities, promoting health equity and any experience working with Latino and Tribal communities?”
- MCHEA staff reviewed and recommended changes for financial assistance forms used by Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital.
- MCHEA hosted a well received and highly attended bullying prevention workshop in all Spanish in the Odell area for Spanish speaking families,
- 6 MCHEA *Latinos en Accion* members attended the City Commission hearing on Housing. With permission from the City Council members, MCHEA Staff interpreted in Spanish. For the very first time, a city council member had a community member address them in Spanish about the urgent needs of affordable housing. After this the City Mayor verbally agreed to commit to a policy that would state that city council should offer interpreting services for those that need it.



*Patricia Muro addressing Hood River City Council in Spanish for the first time ever in the council’s history.*

- The Hood River Mayor has established the Mayor’s Latino Advisory Board, half of which is members of MCHEA! This group informs and advises the mayor on issues that



affect Latinos in our area. Recently the Mayor established a scholarship from this group and the MCHEA members strongly encouraged him to open it up to undocumented students who don't have as many scholarship opportunities.

- Since the start of our grant with OHA/OEI MCHEA staff have helped support the Martin Luther King social justice event in Hood River, and helped invite more Latinos to attend.
- 3 of our MCHEA staff members participate in the Gorge Ecumenical Ministries group, Building Community Connections which meets monthly to address issues of immigration. This group also always plans a social justice day event for Martin Luther King.
- MCHEA staff have helped support having the Hood River County Sherriff, Hood River City Mayor and school superintendents on our local Radio Tierra station interviewed so that Latino community members can learn more about their roles and ask questions. This has led to an increased number of radio listener call-ins and decrease in fear in our Latino community of local law enforcement.
- MCHEA staff co-chairs the Healthy Active Hood River County Coalition that addresses food insecurity, nutrition, behavioral health and access to physical activities. Because of the MCHEA staff this group is more comfortable using equity language and have started to recognize the need to be intentional about doing outreach with non-Anglo communities.
- One of our MCHEA members was trained to be a Zumba Instructor and she has been volunteering providing free dance classes for over a year now!
- Nuestra Comunidad Sana staff facilitated the Community Health Worker Training and trained over 82 community members in our region.
- The Mid-Columbia Regional Community Advisory Council of the PacificSource CCO appointed a MCHEA Staff member as an extended member of the CAC. Another 2 MCHEA members are voting members or “consumers” as the CAC titles it.
- MCHEA work was featured in the National Partnership for Action (NPA) Blueprint for Action as critical work addressing key focus areas for their Region X Health Equity Council. Specific MCHEA activities highlighted include their focus on health promotion and healthcare access around ensuring Latino participation in policy-making. As a part of this work, MCHEA is collaborating with NPA to develop a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) guide that will serve as a regional resource around how to engage most effectively with refugee, immigrant and non-English speaking residents. The guide will include definitions, best practice and compliance links reflecting LEP, with a strong focus on translation and interpretation through a cultural lens.
- Two MCHEA staff serve on the Community Benefit Advisory Group for the Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital, advising them on spending community benefit dollars based on the Community Needs and Assets Assessment. The advisory group funded a regional grant writer to write collaborative grant applications for community agencies and programs. This has lifted the entire community by promoting more collaboration and



\$600,000 + dollars raised for community programs that address the Social Determinants of Health in the first year of the position.

- Mid-Columbia Medical Center in The Dalles hired its first community Health Worker from the first CHW Training cohort.
- MCHEA staff was invited to be a part of the Community Health Worker committee in Portland that culturally adapted and translated the curriculum into Spanish.
- One of our MCHEA staff members kindly suggested to the City that their phone message be translated into Spanish to be more accessible, city changed it, and the phone message is now in simple language and in Spanish.
- The Next Door hired a Community Health Worker to work s with community members that worked specifically on housing issues, this person informed MCHEA team of things he saw and heard.
- The regional housing authority created the Gorge Housing Affordability Team and specifically invited MCHEA staff to communicate any housing of issues that arise at MCHEA Latino leader meetings.
- MCHEA staff is routinely checking in and offering support to the newly elected Latina member to serve on the Hood River County School Board (first Latina to be elected!)
- The Hood River School District revived the School Health Advisory Committee after two years of inactivity. Two MCHEA staff attended, offering input from the Latino community's perspective.
- MCHEA sponsored a forum with U.S representative Greg Walden to discuss health equity issues facing their community members.
- MCHEA has built a relationship with the State Representative Mark Johnson, representative from district 52.
- MCHEA was involved in promoting Senator Jeff Merkley's April Town Hall in Hood River. MCHEA helped promote the event, offering interpretation for the event, and drawing approximately 50 community members.
- MCHEA staff created Community Partner Agreements (CPA) with our community partners group, this is a commitment for partners to assess their organization and implement or reinforce policies that will promote equity.
- MCHEA encouraged Hood River Valley Parks and Recreation District to translate their signage and also recommended a translator.
- MCHEA Coalition has recognized the need for more Latinos to be in positions of decision making power so as coalition members – a person was identified to serve on the for our local transportation board, she accepted the nomination and through Facebook posts and email chains she managed to get elected as a write-in candidate for the Hood River Transportation Board! With over 450 write-ins. She is bilingual in Spanish and English!
- Coalition staff have partnered up with Building Community Connections (BCC) a group of Gorge Ecumenical Ministries to do host immigration Forums, 2 forums were held



during this 3 year grant cycle. The partnership with BCC has been very intentional and specific to issues around immigration.

- Greg Walden’s office assistant reached out to one of MCHEA coalition members to ask her to convene a meeting with Latino leaders to listen to concerns around immigration reform. After years of trying to get Mr. Walden to listen, the power and influence of one of the members worked in the coalition’s favor to make it happen.
- MCHEA staff heard concerns from o community leaders about documentation requirements for volunteer parents at schools, and concerns around having to be documented to volunteer. These concerns were presented to the school district and they changed the volunteer FAQ sheet to be more comprehensive and include clarity in requirements for background checks. This new form has helped eliminate fear of deportation.
- MCHEA staff participate and report about MCHEA activities at the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Meetings and there is a very intentional relationship with this coalition. After attending many meetings where they didn’t offer healthier options for snacks one of the MCHEA staff wrote the facilitators an email encouraging them to model healthy eating by providing healthy options, ever since they have been offering veggies in addition to their snacks.
- MCHEA staff got together with Maija Yasui a longstanding community champion that has brought millions of dollars in grant to serve Hood River County in prevention. Maija helped convene a large group of Native American agency representatives from Lyle, Washington, Portland, Oregon, Warm Springs, and other in-lieu sites in the gorge. The group has continued to meet with support from CRTFIC, their group name is the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)
- MCHEA has a working relationship with The Odell Hispanic Coalition, one of the staff members co-chairs the coalition because MCHEA was identified as a coalition that can authentically engage Latinos. The Odell Hispanic Coalition has a special focus on alcohol and drug prevention in youth. Both coalitions support each other especially with HPCDP work, both have some tobacco money and have been collaborating to do events with the youth in region. An event was held with students of color and taught them how alcohol and tobacco industries target communities of color and also showed them local data and asked them what they would like to see in their community. A Social Justice Workshop that was put on by Western States, MCHEA convened the people to come.
- In 2015 MCHEA collaborated with The Odell Hispanic Coalition to host an event recognizing community leaders that have done something for our region related to prevention ( people recognized included Volunteer Zumba instructors, Youth Group leaders etc. )
- Parkdale Elementary School started a Parkdale Health and Wellness Group and invited MCHEA to be a part of the group specifically to inform the teachers and PTA members about what Latinos need in the upper valley. The group has a special focus on physical



activity opportunities for Parkdale, they support Zumba classes in the upper valley and also arranged for Zumba classes for the kids.

- MCHEA has been advocating about the issues, barriers and needs that local area tribes have in the gorge and more agencies are reaching out and providing services as they can. There is still work to be done here but MCHEA strongly believes that because of supportive efforts there is more awareness about the needs of the tribes
- MCHEA has been serving as a focus group for Gorge Grown for over two years, Gorge Grown looks to MCHEA for advice on how to be more inclusive of Latinos in the Framers Markets. MCHEA CHWs also helped record a PSA for *Radio Tierra* (Radio Earth) promoting the market.
- MCHEA coalition members have received various trainings (see activities above) and because of this have an equity lens that has helped them see more opportunities for change. One of the members noticed that there was a free community event to do healthy heart screenings for kids, and the information was not available in Spanish. Another member approached the appropriate person with their concern of not having information available in Spanish and because of this the hospital will now have a system of information dissemination that is more equitable so all our community members can benefit from such event.
- Providence Hood River and MCHEA staff did a field day to learn about a tribal members and the in-lieu sites in the gorge. A site visit was made and coalition members met some people and talked about needs each small community faces.
- Three MCHEA staff serve of the Oregon Community Health worker Association policy Committee and join monthly calls with other CHWs in the state to talk about local and state policy issues.
- MCHEA and the Odell Hispanic Coalition have been reporting out on Radio Tierra (Earth Radio) every month about what their respective coalitions have been accomplishing. Often call-ins happen frequently from the general Latino community members about upcoming community events and resources.
- MCHEA members have volunteered to be *Juntos* facilitators, *Juntos* is a middle and high school college preparation course for Latino families held in Spanish in 2.5 hour sessions that meet 5-6 times depending on if it's a middle school course or a high school course. The goal of *Juntos* is to inspire Latino families to pursue a higher education.
- MCHEA coalition members partnered with Mid-Columbia Housing Authority (MCHA) to offer Spanish Homeownership Classes and to change some lecture teachings and incorporate some popular education methodology. MCHEA staff trained and implemented 3
- MCHEA staff convened a meeting with OHSU Diabetes Prevention Program Director and the CCO Director to have a conversation about implementing the diabetes program in the Columbia Gorge region.



## *Challenges*

It would be ideal to have long term funding. Changing policy is not something that can be easily achieved in one or two years. Working with marginalized, rural isolated populations takes time. Add to this language barriers – it requires more time. Also, depending on the environment that each community has, even if training is made possible, “setting the state” in communities also takes time to gain the trust of all involved – mainstream community and the communities of color/immigrant community. Because of the work with volunteer coalition members, their availability is limited. Most work at least two jobs – year-round. Sometimes three in the harvest seasons. Due to the economic and social injustices, it is not that they do not want to participate – they don’t have the time. The stipend...they don’t offset the time and efforts made – but they help offset gas...not having to make dinner, being able to buy food for lunch the next day. The time needed to adapt trainings, information, data so that it can be understood by lay coalition members. . It has taken staff many meetings to talk about how polices and laws are enacted and we still could use more support learning especially when curriculum on these subjects are not available in Spanish. As staff we have had to create curriculum to teach about things such as Robert’s Rules of Order, How to be a part of a Board of Directors, how to address council at city hall meetings etc.

Policy work takes years. We often use the example of seat belt laws, and how now it’s just habit for most people to hop into a car and put on their seat belt. Although coalition members know this, it can be hard to showcase small wins when the end goal is policy change. We have overcome this challenge by always talking about the many wins and successes our coalition has had thanks to our Latino leader’s leadership.

After year three, important organizations with a lot of influence know who MCHEA is and are wanting to partner. We definitely need at least a couple of years just to plan what the work will be, It’s been hard to have just a couple of months to plan and then try to implement. As a Regional Health Equity Coalition I would have liked to have more technical assistance on how to effectively work towards policy change, because there is a lot to address, which can get overwhelming quick. The funding should be increased to allow for at least 4 FTE paid staff to coordinate, manage and report back on coalition work. For 2017 have hired a full time employee that will help support coalition coordinator, this will hopefully help with this challenge.

The Coalition respects the management sovereignty of each organization that we work with, but we continue to struggle to get invitations to important conversations from decision makers. Community Health Workers should be included in communitywide decision making processes. MCHEA staff have also gotten invited to advise and suggest how to work with Latino populations in the region in various research projects, but we were invited after all IRB processes and methods were established, which did not work for Latino community members.



## *Lessons learned*

Even though we created more work for our staff by creating 4 working groups for our coalition it was important to get genuine input from our priority population. We didn't have a formal coalition setting as defined by dictionaries but we did what was appropriate for our communities to create a safe space that allowed for genuine discussions and authentic engagement.

Initially we were asked to identify our priority populations, after carefully looking at the regional data we had we chose to work with Native Americans, Pacific Islanders and Latinos. Recruitment efforts were successful in Hood River County with Latinos, due in large part because of the history our local Community Health Workers have with the community members. Recruitment for Latinos in Wasco County was a challenge and later we realized this was because historically Latinos in Wasco have not been asked to participate in "Latino specific" groups to provide input on health related barriers, this was something very new for that side of our region. Recruitment for Pacific Islanders was a challenge, we reached out to key people in the region that work with Samoan families and students of color and were not able to reach out to those specific communities due to confidentiality reasons through school personnel. We kept trying but were unsuccessful, and as Latino staff we felt the need to have some who shared the culture to help recruit which we were not able to connect with anyone. Then came recruitment for Native Americans, thanks to our coalition partners from Let's Talk Diversity Erin Tofte and Emma, they gave us a name of a community member in Celilo Village to reach out to. After a couple of tries to find this person, we encountered many barriers. The disparities in these communities are visibly disproportionate. We tried to recruit but the needs among many for basic needs did not allow for participation. We hired a contractor that helps us get in contact with some state Native American liaisons who helped us convene more leaders from around the area that work in different sectors with Native Americans ranging from DHS to Intertribal Fisheries commissions. We got in touch with a local tribal enforcement leader who was very interested in the coalition work. Our connection was Mitch Hicks, who with the help of some OHA staff and us convened a large group of about 20 Native American agency representatives to talk about the different needs for Native Americans in the gorge. After the first initial meeting our team decided to continue to support where needed and a community member stepped up to work with them free of charge to try and secure some funding so that there could be a culture specific coalition with Native American staff for our region. Ever since this group had been meeting at least once a month to continue to talk about potential solutions, there's a lot of barriers with jurisdictions and permissions to enter Indian Nation etc. systems barriers have made the work in this area with Native Americans extremely hard.

Also because as MCHEA staff we help facilitate and make connections for our community members involved we end up making a lot of work for ourselves. We prioritized the barriers to address at the beginning of the year but as time progressed priorities changed and we kept making connections and it was hard to keep up. We have gotten a lot of requests and invitations to join meetings and trainings and our capacity as staff is very limited. We always have a lot going on and always trying to connecting many dots. A lesson learned is to be more mindful



about the tasks we take on and more realistic about staff time we have to facilitate and make those existing relationships that we have with community partners stronger.

### ***Next Steps***

The work that has been accomplished by MCHEA has been second to none. MCHEA existed before the RHEC grant was funded – but there was a definite “before” and “after”. Like any other program/activities – when funds are specifically dedicated to accomplish objectives, those objectives are met. The Next Door has addressed equity and health for many decades. It will continue to do so. MCHEA is committed to continue to address the needs of the Columbia Gorge region. .

The success and long-term sustainability of this coalition is already being felt. Long term changes have been made with various community partner policies and “the way of doing business” is now including addressing the needs of Latinos from the Columbia Gorge region. A three year grant is barely scratching the surface of what can continue to be accomplished. MCHEA is dedicated to furthering equity through continued grant writing and seeking various ways to fund the activities. Recently, a grant addressing equity was written and awarded by Meyer Memorial Trust to provide partial funding to continue MCHEA’s activities

The success and long-term sustainability of this will depend largely on the ability to develop an internal system that is supported financially by decision makers of member organizations and by other relevant organizations seeking to increase equity in their organization. MCHEA is excited about the possibility of creating a “Menu of Services”, since MCHEA is already used as an important resource for various equity related services like: plain language adaptations, culturally appropriate reviews, translation, interpretation and other consulting type services.

With partner organizations MCHEA created community partner agreements (CPAs) not everyone had the time to draft one up, but they were all strongly encourage to do so. These CPAs serve as a commitment to the Columbia Gorge region from each partner organization that they will commit to a policy change or something else that will move them towards serving Latinos in a more equitable fashion in each respective organization. MCHEA hopes that these CPAs that, although not legally binding, can serve as a reminder to community partners that everyone must all be intentional about their commitment to equity. MCHEA will continue to work on these CPA’s through 2017.

### ***Recommendations to other RHECs***

MCHEA staff would like to suggest that RHEC’s continue to provide funding to allow communities to convene interested community members and listen to what the community needs are, there is no worse approach than to assume what the community wants based on community data, best-practices and *expert* advice (alone with no community input). It is best-practice to take existing data and check-back with community. It is essential to allow grants to provide incentives



for participation and find out what the population of focus needs to fully participate in the coalition and provide feedback. For Latino coalitions after hour meetings with dinner and childcare work best. Always ask the priority population what they need to participate, and make it happen. Institutional barriers will sometimes make us feel helpless, don't let that happen change takes time and this important work moves at the speed of liberation.

If RHEC's could have some sort of database of "Equity Friendly" or "Equity Knowledgeable" agencies and organizations from each of our communities – it would help for local coalitions to be able to know how to approach partners. Find out from the very beginning what kind of leverage each community partner has, MCHEA staff found out later that some community partners have a more clear understanding than others about how decisions and policy change get made at their organizations. There needs to be a clear understanding by each member so that MCHEA staff can support community partners where needed. MCHEA's ultimate goals are to change, implement or adapt policies that can increase equity and if members don't clearly understand the process at respective organizations, momentum towards policy change diminishes. MCHEA staff asked community partners to draw out their organizational chart at a meeting and explain to the rest of the group what the process would look like if they wanted to introduce an equity-related policy to their organization. MCHEA staff also asked if they knew what the steps would be to adopt a policy at their respective organization, some people knew and others didn't. It was a great exercise to get people thinking about procedures at work and how change happens at different entities.

### ***Programmatic recommendations to OHA***

- Coalition Training. Like Community Anti-drug Coalitions of America Academy.
- Requirement that over 70% of the coalitions be composed of community members that represent the communities of color that they serve.
- Longer grant periods (5-10 years) when dealing with policy change
- Require equity language in policy for grants awarded for all OHA programs – funding is the “bottle neck” – if by requiring the “equity language” for each agency/organization funded – then as local coalition MCHEA can help those agencies/organizations look at their current policies and adapt them and do compliance checks.

