

Improving Community Health Through Cross-Sector Partnerships:

Addressing Childhood Obesity in the Columbia Gorge



Cross-sector partners worked together to:

- ▶ Collect and track local data on childhood obesity
- ▶ Create a broad-based coalition
- ▶ Fund a Collective Impact Health Specialist to expand the coalition and secure funding for additional projects
- ▶ Offset restaurant licensing fees for restaurants participating in the Drink Fit program to reduce the amount of sugary beverages sold

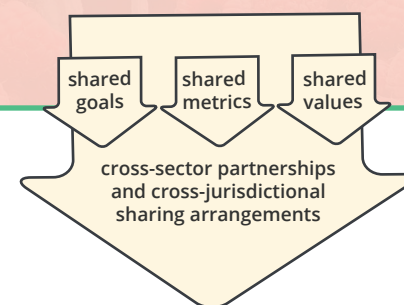
Background

Health starts—long before illness—in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and jobs. Public health agencies in Oregon are collaborating with community partners to make communities healthier and ensure that people have access to critical prevention services. Community partnership development is a foundational capability for state and local public health agencies in Oregon and for many decades, local public health agencies throughout Oregon have demonstrated skill and dedication in forming cross-sector relationships with private,

public, and governmental organizations that share many of the same goals. **The purpose of this case study is to increase understanding of the effective formation and use of cross-sector partnerships to improve community health.**

The Project: Addressing Childhood Obesity

Based on observations of an increased rate of diabetes in the students of North Wasco County School District, a project was launched to gather more data about obesity in school-aged children and design solutions for reversing unhealthy trends.



For more information: <http://ncphd.org/wellness/drink-fit/>

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In 2013, the North Central Public Health District, the North Wasco County School District, and the Mid-Columbia Medical Center collaborated on a project to collect height and weight data from students in one elementary school in the district. Initial results indicated that the rate of obesity for students at this elementary school was higher than the state average. Based on these initial findings, the health department secured funding from PacificSource Community Solutions CCO for additional data collection.

The health department convened more than 30 local organizations to develop a multifaceted approach for helping children grow up at a healthy weight. This group focused on identifying policy, systems and environmental change strategies to address childhood obesity.

Project Goals

The goal of this project was to reduce childhood obesity. The partnership identified various strategies, one of which was reducing the consumption of sugary beverages.

The Partnership

As partners came together, Oregon Solutions, a non-profit organization that provides grants and support for community-based projects, provided support to convene a local childhood obesity coalition. Oregon Solutions also provided intensive planning support as the coalition identified key issues and top priorities.

At the beginning of the planning process coalition members signed a "Declaration of Cooperation." The declaration affirmed each organization's commitment to work together to prevent and reduce childhood obesity and laid out what each agency agreed to contribute to the collective effort.

A Collective Impact Health Specialist, funded by Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital, recruited additional coalition members and secured funds for projects. The Collective Impact Health Specialist supports collaborative projects by convening partners to develop collaborative solutions for a community health problem.

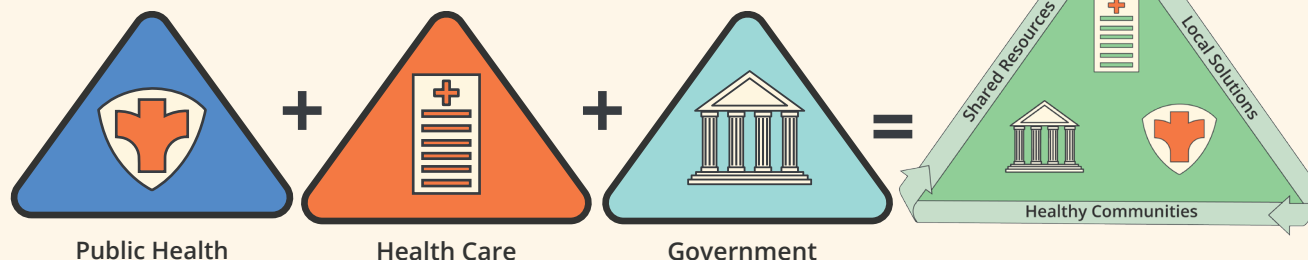
The coalition included public health, coordinated care organizations (CCOs), hospitals and other groups within the health care sector, early learning and education, community-based organizations, and private businesses.

Multiple partners contributed resources and/or financial support, including staff time to take on activities within the Wasco County Community Action Plan for Reducing Childhood Obesity.

“Identifying a community need, bringing the community together to identify different solutions to address that need, and then creating and implementing specific programs that fit into that bigger picture; that’s how we’ve been operating as a community for the last three years with great intentionality. It’s been quite successful.”

—Health Care Partner

Childhood Obesity Convening Partners



Accomplishments

The coalition initiated an innovative approach to reducing the consumption of sugary beverages called “Drink Fit.” This project offered a discount on restaurant inspection fees to restaurants that did not give free refills and had proportional prices for sugary drinks, including sports drinks. Many restaurants saw the value in the project and opted in. The reduction in inspection fees was offset by a donation from the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization.

In addition, key accomplishments included:

- ▶ Convening partners and stakeholders in a coalition increased awareness of the roles and programs of other stakeholders. It has allowed coalition members to find areas where duplication in services and programs could be eliminated.
- ▶ The coalition collected timely data to track progress; height and weight data are now collected for all the schools in the school district and in the early childhood education program, Head Start.
- ▶ The Head Start program changed their policies to support children growing up at a healthy weight, including a policy for dedicated physical activity time, limited screen time, and serving more fruits and vegetables.

Barriers + Success Factors

Project partners found that securing funding for projects that focus on “upstream” approaches can be especially difficult to obtain because policy interventions are new to some funders who are used to funding instructional and direct service programs. Also, the benefit may be seen as long term with short term “results” being difficult to quantify.

Lessons Learned

This project is rooted in community-level data and provides an example of a cross-sector partnership where each partner brought their unique expertise and contributed resources to the partnership

Having community data that clearly showed a serious problem was instrumental in energizing multiple sectors in the community to find and implement solutions.

The broad participation of many community groups added to the visibility of this coalition, which raised more community awareness about childhood obesity and effective solutions for reversing the trends.

“Our work is right at that junction of the medical services, social services, and social determinants of health. Our medical community has very strongly endorsed the idea that things can occur outside of a medical clinic that impact a person’s health including food, housing, transportation, jobs, mental health, and dental health. There’s a lot of things that happen outside of a doctor’s office that impact what happens inside, and our medical community has accepted that.”

—Public Health Partner

“The coalition really cemented our existing and future efforts as important and relevant.”

—Health Care Partner

Moving Forward

The coalition continues to engage partners to achieve community goals for healthy food and active living. For example, the City of The Dalles recently updated its transportation plan to include Safe Routes to Schools.

“We learned a lot about what others were doing in the community and they learned what we were doing. Overall, that helped to reduce duplication of effort and does create more opportunities to collaborate in the future.”

—Public Health Partner

Coalition members included:

City of Mosier, North Wasco School District, Mid-Columbia Medical Center, Mid-Columbia Health Foundation, Mid-Columbia Children's Council, City of The Dalles, Columbia Gorge Education Service District, North Central Public Health District, Oregon Child Development Coalition, Oregon Health Sciences University, Mid-Columbia Community Action Council, Acclaiming Christ Through Sports, Oregon Health Authority, Columbia Gorge Health Council, Community Harvest Cooperative Grocery, St. Mary's Academy, Columbia Gorge Community College, Oregon State University Extension Service, The Next Door, Inc., Planetree Medical Library, PacificSource Community Solutions CCO, Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital, Community Connections, Oregon Solutions, Wasco County Youth Services, Hat Creek Consulting, Gorge Grown Food Network, Subway Sandwich, and the Oregon Department of Human Services.



This photo from *The Dalles Chronicle* depicts partners from public, nonprofit and private organizations signing the “Declaration of Cooperation” in an effort to reduce childhood obesity in Wasco County.



Rede Group would like to thank the North Central Public Health District, Oregon State University Extension in Hood River and Wasco County, the North Central Wasco County School District 21, and Mid-Columbia Children's Council for their assistance with this case study.