

Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program

Phase I Evaluation Findings 2006-2008

Executive Summary

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Map of CCROPP Communities



Map courtesy of the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program

Executive Summary

Introduction

The California Endowment established the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) in 2006 to address childhood and adult obesity through place-based policy changes that support access to physical activity and healthy foods in California's Central Valley region.

CCROPP emerged from The California Endowment's Healthy Eating Active Communities (HEAC) program, which was the first foundation-funded initiative to promote policy and environmental change strategies as the primary approach to reversing the trend in obesity prevalence. The Endowment recognized the significant burden health disparities placed on the lowest income Californians residing in mostly rural, unincorporated, agricultural communities in the Central Valley. As a result, The Endowment worked with the Central California Public Health Partnership to design a regional program that would be tailored to the particular needs of this vulnerable region of the state.

While the CCROPP design builds on many features found in HEAC, particularly the environmental and policy approach to obesity prevention, unique characteristics of CCROPP include its ability to combine both local and regional strategies and leadership, its focus on urban, rural and unincorporated communities, and engagement of strong grassroots community advocates for environmental change.

CCROPP is being carried out by local partnerships between public health departments, community-based organizations and community obesity prevention councils in eight contiguous Central Valley counties. Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Tulare and Merced counties were funded in 2006. Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties joined CCROPP in 2008. Each county partnership participates in a regional effort to coordinate strategies and build regional momentum across the Central Valley around common policy and environmental change goals. The regional CCROPP office at California State University, Fresno leads and administers the regional effort, supports and promotes the work of local grantees, and coordinates grantee technical support in collaboration with the Partnership for the Public's Health, Public Health Institute.

Evaluation Design and Methods

The purpose of the CCROPP evaluation is to document grantee progress and measure changes in the nutrition and physical activity environments resulting from grantee interventions. Samuels & Associates has created innovative tools tailored to CCROPP to measure a range of outcomes from changes in nutrition and physical activity environments, organizational and legislative policy change, and community engagement. The multi-method, participatory evaluation is designed to contribute to the pool of evidence linking environmental approaches to healthy eating and active living outcomes, particularly in low-income, ethnically diverse communities. The following table summarizes the qualitative and quantitative methodologies employed in Phase I to capture the accomplishments, challenges, lessons learned and best practices from CCROPP's work on environmental and policy change:

METHODS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Logic Models: Developed at the local and regional levels to define interventions, expected changes, and evidence of change. The logic models serve as a guide for the grantees in implementing their strategies and as a guidepost for the evaluation.▪ Environmental Assessments<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Public health departments: Examines beverage and food sales and physical activity opportunities at health care institutions/public health departments.○ Nutrition environments/farmer's markets: Documents beverages and foods for sale at farmer's markets and produce stands. Tracks other environmental features such as healthy eating signage. Tracks EBT and WIC voucher acceptance.○ Physical activity/built environments: Examines the physical activity environment and resources in neighborhoods.▪ Community Resident Focus Groups: Document community residents' perceptions of their social and built environment and its influence on health, and to explore factors that engage community residents to advocate for improvements in their community.▪ Elected/Government Official Stakeholder Interviews: Documents how local elected and governmental officials are engaged in activities to change community environments to prevent childhood obesity and promote healthy eating and physical activity including perceptions of policies and resources needed, and barriers to changing community environments.▪ Grantee Reporting Interviews/Grantee Profiles: Annual interviews conducted with the site community and public health department leads to discuss progress, accomplishments and challenges. Key successes and challenges are summarized in a grantee profile.

Creating Safe Places to Play and Access to Healthy Foods

Public Health Departments

At the outset of CCROPP, public health departments were actively engaged in creating the overall concept for the initiative. In partnership with a community organization they created a local logic model that encompassed work in the community and within public health departments themselves. Two years into the initiative, public health departments in the Central Valley have already achieved important goals, including:

- Engagement of staff around healthy eating and physical activity
- Adoption of wellness policies (including nutrition standards for food and beverages sold, physical activity standards, and breast feeding policies), and
- Expansion of public health department wellness policies and/or programs county-wide

The CCROPP public health departments have served as an important anchor for the programs in each one of the Central Valley counties. They have provided leadership to the community partner, provided an important link to public and elected officials, and have served as effective role models for other government agencies to adopt programs and policies that support healthy eating and physical activity in the worksite and in the community.

Farmer's Markets

The Central Valley, one of our nation's richest agricultural regions, is lacking in easy access to the many fruits and vegetables grown in the region. Low income residents, who may work in the fields, do not have stores or markets in their neighborhoods that sell fresh fruits and vegetables. The CCROPP grantees' work with farmer's markets, produce stands, and flea markets has yielded tremendous opportunities to change the food landscape in these poor communities, including:

- Increased access to healthy foods in the Central Valley
- Increased collaboration between community, schools, public health departments, and farmers/vendors
- Increased redemption of WIC vouchers
- Keeping local produce local, and
- Attraction of diverse customers (community residents, parents, school staff, WIC clients)

These markets and stands are time intensive and need the continued support of CCROPP sites to help them expand and maintain viability. However, every CCROPP community now has access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The farmer's markets and produce stands have brought new vitality to some of these neighborhoods and brought a diversity of partners together including schools, community residents, public health departments, and farmers.

Physical Activity Environments/Built Environments

In addition to increasing access to healthy food, each of the CCROPP grantees selected at least one environment where they would work to increase opportunities for physical activity. The environments include community parks, as well as school and residential neighborhoods. Overall most of the physical activity areas selected by the sites do not support walkability and bikeability, and in most of the areas there are insufficient traffic control devices, crosswalks, and bike facilities/amenities. Sidewalks, where they do exist, are often in poor condition or not continuous on both sides of the street. There are few amenities for physical activity in some of the parks or in some cases they are poorly maintained. The CCROPP partners report a wide range of activities involved in making changes to the physical activity areas in their communities. A few examples of this work include the installation of soccer goal posts in a park in Tulare, the construction of a covered bus stop next to a school in Fresno, and the community-led clean-up of a park in Kern, which included installing a walking path around the park's perimeter. Although each experience is unique, one common goal that each of the sites expresses is to increase overall safety in the areas, both in terms of traffic safety and crime/violence. In order to achieve this goal many CCROPP partners and community residents have formed or are working to form partnerships with planners, policymakers and police officers. A few of the sites are also looking into other ways to secure funding for changes and sustain work through policy-related measures.

Community Engagement

Authentic community engagement has been central to shaping nutrition and physical activity policy and environmental change efforts in each of the CCROPP sites. At the onset of the program, CCROPP grantees were asked to form obesity councils with strong representation from residents in the communities that they were working in. While each CCROPP site has been successful in engaging community residents, engagement and participation of the community has looked different throughout the region and has in some cases changed over the course of Phase I. In order to understand the needs of community residents to support their work and build their capacity, knowledge, and confidence in environmental and policy change efforts, focus groups have been conducted in Spanish, English and Hmong. The focus groups contributed to understanding community resident's perceptions of their social and built environment and its influence on health, as well as the factors that engage community residents to advocate for improvements in their community:

- Issues related to crime and safety were identified as a major deterrent to physical activity and a contributing factor to obesity
- Lack of places to play and concerns regarding crime and traffic safety make it difficult for children and families to be physically active

- Lack of healthy food establishments, such as supermarkets and farmer's markets, high cost of food, and safety concerns make it difficult to eat healthy
- Community residents need support and trainings to build advocacy skills as well as opportunities for their voice to be heard

The obesity councils and community residents have defined and prioritized the grantees' work. As a result, the CCROPP work resonates with the community and is community driven.

Accomplishments

The CCROPP communities have demonstrated significant progress in increasing access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities in urban, poor, rural and unincorporated communities throughout the region. CCROPP has consistently framed obesity prevention strategies around access to healthy food and safe places to play. The following section outlines the major accomplishments of Phase I of the CCROPP program:

CCROPP has created an innovative community-driven policy and environmental change approach to obesity prevention in the Central Valley:

- Community based organizations and public health departments are collaborating to create healthy eating opportunities and safe places to play in their local communities, counties and across the region.
- The CCROPP model has local and regional elements and progress at the two levels is synergistic. The local obesity prevention strategies are informing the regional strategies; the regional framework has contributed to the strengthening of local efforts.
- CCROPP has created a strong regional strategy by building a community among the CCROPP grantees including the local sites, home office, Cal State Fresno, technical assistance providers, evaluator and other partners that propels the grantees' work and solidifies CCROPP's regional presence.
- The CCROPP sites have tailored environmental and policy change strategies to meet the needs of low-income, rural, unincorporated and disadvantaged ethnic communities in a climate of poor resources, inadequate infrastructure and anti-immigrant sentiment.
- CCROPP regional and local logic model strategies emphasize nutrition and physical activity environmental change through community building and engagement.
- CCROPP sites developed site-specific logic models that reflect the goals and the strategies of the CCROPP program, tailored to their community's needs.
- Evaluation findings, including farmer's market and focus group findings have helped convey grantee priorities and inform strategies locally and regionally.

CCROPP grantees are increasing access to healthy food and physical activity opportunities:

- All CCROPP sites are engaged in the CX3 process and other local data collection activities to document local food and physical activity environments.
- CCROPP sites have established or are in the process of expanding farmer's markets and/or produce stands to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables in locations where access had been absent or limited.
- Sites have established markets/stands that accept either WIC or EBT for the lowest income consumers.
- The majority of CCROPP sites are advocating for the inclusion of health language in general plans, participating in land use/parks planning or zoning ordinance reform to increase access to safe and attractive physical activity opportunities and healthy foods, or increasing walkability in neighborhoods and around schools through measures such as safe walking routes.
- CCROPP sites are improving parks and access to open space through interventions such as infrastructure enhancements, equipment upgrades, walking groups, opening of school grounds, and development of joint use agreements.
- CCROPP sites have improved nutrition and/or physical activity environments in health departments, other county agencies, local clinics, and hospitals through the establishment of nutrition or breastfeeding policies, establishing worksite wellness policies, removal or restocking of vending machines, expansion of insurance coverage to include prevention, and worksite wellness activities.
- Additional interventions being implemented at the local level by grantees include increasing food stamp participation, improving foods served in childcare settings, training pre-school providers on healthy eating and physical activity, engaging physician champions, improving physical activity environments in schools, increasing activity levels in PE, and corner store conversions.

Strong leadership deepens impact and extends CCROPP's reach:

- CCROPP leads are viewed as champions for changing nutrition and physical activity environments in their local communities.
- All CCROPP sites have established relationships with policy makers to advance their strategies including Boards of Supervisors, school board members, and planners.
- The CCROPP sites have emerged as a strong voice regionally and across the State for changing nutrition and physical activity environments by participating as active partners in the California Convergence, presenting at HEAC meetings, and engaging in statewide policy strategies such as menu labeling, shaping joint use strategies, and informing safety and violence prevention.

Community resident engagement is the cornerstone of CCROPP's success changing food and physical activity environments:

- CCROPP grantees have created diverse, representative Obesity Prevention councils that include community residents, local governmental agencies, community-based organizations, business, and other partners.
- Grantees have been successful in engaging and mobilizing community residents to define and prioritize issues, strategies and outcomes, and advocate for changes with local decision makers.
- CCROPP grantees are supporting community residents as advocates by building their capacity as advocates and change agents.
- Several sites are engaging youth in photo voice data collection activities, and other youth development and leadership activities.

CCROPP sites are working to disseminate and sustain their accomplishments:

- CCROPP is the recipient of a RJWF Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities grant to develop community resident leadership capacity across the region.
- The CCROPP sites participate in the California Convergence activities and their experiences, particularly in the area of joint use and working with rural communities, are contributing to shaping a statewide policy agenda.
- CCROPP grantees have taken advantage of technical assistance. CCROPP grantees have also provided guidance to HEAC and other grantees around the state.
- All CCROPP sites have secured or are in the process of pursuing additional funding from sources such as Network for a Healthy California, CalTrans, USDA, First Five, Aetna, and the Vitamin Settlement.
- CCROPP has garnered extensive local and statewide media coverage for its community health improvement model and strategies and successes at the local level. CCROPP strategies and lessons learned have been featured as case studies in several reports.
- CCROPP has been successful in disseminating its unique approach to environmental change at the local, regional, state and national levels by participating in national and state conferences and speaking to and sharing experiences with diverse audiences.
- CCROPP has developed and disseminated resources to communities and the field such as the *Eating Better and Moving More* fotonovela and the *10 Steps to Setting Up a School Fruit and Vegetable Stand* guide.

Regional Lessons Learned

As a regional program with strong local interventions, the CCROPP model has generated a number of lessons learned:

- Coordination and ‘authentic’ leadership have “branded” the CCROPP identity and united the partners and communities in a shared purpose.
- Media advocacy and a purposeful communications strategy have resulted in both local and regional awareness of CCROPP and rapid dissemination of accomplishments.
- Bringing the CCROPP grantees together regionally has built esprit de corps among partners, elevated local experiences to the regional level, and promoted the sharing of strategies, lessons learned and challenges.

Conclusion

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program demonstrates that it is possible to improve access to fruits and vegetables and physical activity spaces in historically disadvantaged and under-resourced communities at the local and regional levels.¹ The CCROPP experience has also shown that strong regional program leadership and authentic community engagement is a necessary condition for making and sustaining these changes. The successful strategies and lessons learned through CCROPP are contributing to building and evolving the movement to improve nutrition and physical activity environments across California.

¹ The evaluation defines access as the *availability* of fresh produce and physical activity opportunities in the environments targeted for intervention by the grantees.