

Using Healthy Eating and Active Living Initiatives to Reduce Health Disparities

DRA Project Report 08-01

Communities are embracing healthy eating and active living initiatives across the nation. Eight leading national programs worked with Disparity Reducing Advances Project (DRA Project) of the Institute for Alternative Futures to share what's working for low income communities and communities of color. These national programs included: [Active Living by Design](#) of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; [the California Endowment's Healthy Eating Active Communities Program](#); CDC's [Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health Across the U.S.](#) (REACH U.S.); CDC's [Steps to a Healthier US Program](#); [Kaiser Permanente's Community Health Initiatives](#); [Place Matters: Addressing the Root Causes of Health Disparities](#) of the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; W.K. Kellogg Foundation's [Food and Fitness Initiative](#); and the YMCA's [Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities](#).

Based on the work done with these eight national programs, the DRA Project concluded that low income and minority communities can be effective in preventing or reducing health disparities in such chronic diseases as cancer, diabetes and heart disease if they use healthy eating and active living initiatives that adhere to five strategic principles.

- 1) Contribute to Healthy Community Conditions:** Infrastructure matters. By contributing to comprehensive improvements to neighborhood safety, physical design, and built environment, initiatives can have a deep and long-lasting influence. Changes in infra-structure, including improved parks, community gardens, well designed pedestrian zones and commercial offerings of fresh affordable foods are worthwhile objectives.
- 2) Build Community Networks:** By working to build community networks supporting local health whenever they enter a community, initiatives can have a greater impact over a longer period. Effective networking includes community leaders, role models, gate keepers, as well as program participants.
- 3) Be Framed Around Local Concerns and Benefits-** Emphasizing local benefits including reduced crime, improved schools, socialization, economic development, family participation, and increased energy has greater resonance than focusing on fitness and nutrition alone.
- 4) Mitigate Access Barriers:** Participants in community-based efforts can face additional challenges and expenses when accessing transportation, health facilities, childcare and grocery stores. Initiatives that help find solutions to these challenges are more successful.
- 5) Acknowledge and Leverage Cultural Strengths:** Cultural empowerment can be a strong motivator in many communities and can contribute to the success of healthy eating and active living initiatives. This principle includes emphasizing culturally focused healthy diets and exercise patterns and using language-appropriate program materials.

The full report is available at:

http://www.altfutures.com/dra/Report_08_01_Using_Healthy_Eating_and_Active_Living_Initiatives_%20to_Reduce_Health_Disparities.pdf.

For more information on the DRA Project, visit our website at www.altfutures.com/draproject.

"The challenge is not only to anticipate the future, but to create it."

The DRA Project - Institute for Alternative Futures

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