

**Blueprint Seed Grant Final Report
Submitted by the State of Alabama
October 31, 2007**

Background and Overview

Alabama has high obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer rates. Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity are consistently listed as contributing factors to these high rates. Currently the problems are being addressed separately, with poor lifestyle choices being the overarching issue. Poor lifestyle choices can be targeted and improved through wellness programs. These programs can help participants become more aware of their choices and provide the skills to change unhealthy behaviors leading to improved health and wellbeing.

Upon receiving a seed grant from the Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors (ASTPHND) of \$2,500, leaders of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Division (NPA) of the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) were able to start the process of developing a comprehensive state wellness plan. The process has helped to prioritize efforts to improve the health and well-being of Alabama communities.

Developing the State Wellness Plan began with key leaders representing a diverse group with wellness interest from various health related task forces /councils, public health, academia, health care, education, businesses, and community groups being invited to a statewide meeting, forming a State Wellness Coalition.

At the first meeting, the State Health Officer issued the challenge of bringing the separate efforts together for a coordinated approach stating that the intent of the Wellness Coalition was not to undo or change the efforts in place, but to help develop the integrated plan for the entire State. The group was challenged to write a state plan that was realistic, yet used visionary methods to sustain a cultural change where people want to and are able to make healthy lifestyle choices to promote wellness. The action started with the group seeing the same vision, supporting a unified mission statement, and agreeing on a wellness model.

Eight venues were selected by the Coalition to be the focus areas of the Plan. The National Wellness Institute's Six Dimensions of Wellness Model and the Social-Ecological Model were analyzed and used in the development of the State Wellness Plan. As a final step in the process, the Coalition is using the MCH funded publication, Cornerstones of a Healthy Lifestyle: Blueprint for Nutrition and Physical Activity to apply relevant aspects.

Blueprint Cornerstones Addressed

Three Cornerstones have been addressed by Alabama's seed grant project. The funds received provided a means of hosting a statewide meeting of key leaders, forming a State Wellness Coalition. This collaboration initiated new working partnerships (Cornerstone #2) and generated much more interest than expected. As news of the newly formed Coalition continues to spread across the state, requests to join the State Wellness Coalition are continuing to be received, and accepted. Current Coalition partners have suggested and brought their own partners into the group which has helped to build additional collaborative efforts.

The State Wellness Plan is evidenced based research, with best practices/ promising practices encouraged (Cornerstone #3). The State Wellness Coalition partners have relevant expertise and skills to support and guide community members in policy development and planning utilizing evidenced based research.

The concept of tailoring messages was well received by the State Wellness Coalition, however, due to limited funds; implementation of public awareness campaigns during preferred viewing and listening times is unattainable (Cornerstone #5). However, work will continue among the Coalition partners to include communication strategies within the State Wellness Plan to reach all populations. The development of Wellness Kits have been suggested by various Coalition partners for each of the targeted venues. This will provide an opportunity to incorporate tailored wellness messages within each kit. The possibility of developing the kits will be reviewed as the State Wellness Plan is finalized.

Opportunities as a result of the Seed Grant

The new partnerships which have resulted from the formation of the State Wellness Coalition are too numerous to list but are so beneficial in regards to the opportunities that have been created by the sharing of information and knowledge.

Information about the Wellness Coalition and the development of the State Wellness Plan was provided at an Obesity Task Force meeting and a Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition meeting. This presented an opportunity to recruit additional Wellness Coalition partners and raise awareness about the Blueprint.

Barriers and Lessons Learned

An extensive search was done for other existing comprehensive wellness plans to potentially use as models for Alabama's process, but none were found. However, other states had various plans which contained some elements of wellness which could be used as starting points.

Another barrier encountered was determining how to define Wellness so that a realistic and workable plan could be written.

Other Funding Sources used for the seed grant project

In-kind funding was provided for the time and travel of staff from the Nutrition and Physical Activity Division, Alabama Department of Public Health and the University of Alabama at Birmingham who worked on the seed grant project.

Wellness Coalition partners have offered and are providing free meeting spaces and lunches for participants as work continues on this project.

Words of Advice

The application process for the seed grant is uncomplicated so we strongly encourage other states to apply. Especially since the possibilities of using and disseminating the Cornerstones of a Healthy Lifestyle Blueprint for Nutrition and Physical Activity are unlimited. In addition, the technical assistance from ASTPHND and the sharing of information with other seed grant funded states has been beneficial.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to have been able to put together a State Wellness Coalition for the purpose of writing a State Wellness Plan for Alabama using the Blueprint as the basis. It is anticipated that the Coalition will be around for many years helping to implement and evaluate the strategies developed within the Plan.