KEY FACTORS FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT

To improve communities—to make them places where people are healthy, safe, and involved — takes a lot of work. Coalition leaders, work groups, and stakeholders should collaborate effectively with other individuals and organizations, both inside and outside of the community, to support change that modifies local health conditions.

TO ADDRESS WHAT MATTERS TO COMMUNITY MEMBERS, WE NEED TO CHANGE THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH WE LIVE, WITH THE HOPE THAT CHANGING THOSE CONDITIONS WILL CHANGE PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR...[1]

To support change toward improved community health, coalitions and partnerships should focus on environmental changes—bringing about those community and systems changes that modify local conditions. These changes are an intermediate outcome in the long process of community health improvement. Community and systems changes fall in to one of three categories, all of which should correlate to community-determined goals.

- New or modified programs – for example, after-school programs or prevention services.
- New or modified policies – for example, higher fines for selling tobacco products to minors.
- New or modified practices – for example, improved access to health services.

KEY FACTORS

Research and experience suggests that there are several essential factors that contribute to community change and improvement planning. The South Dakota Good & Healthy Community Health Needs Assessment and Improvement Planning Toolkit includes additional information on some of those essential factors listed below.

1. **Clear vision and mission statements.** Initiatives with a clear and specific focus bring about much higher rates of change than broad "healthy communities" efforts which lack a targeted mission. See the section *Vision and Mission Statements* in the Toolkit for more discussion on these statements.

2. **Workable community health action and improvement plan for community and systems change.** Identifying specific community changes (i.e. new or modified programs, policies, and practices) may be the single, most important practice that can be implemented. See the section *Writing a Community Health Action Plan* in the Toolkit for more information.

3. **Developing and supporting community leadership.** Strong leadership can dramatically affect the rate of change for a community. See the section *Key Stakeholders* in the Toolkit for more discussion.

4. **Sector engagement.** Stakeholders from all areas of the community are necessary to identify issues and support health improvement change that affects all sectors of the community (i.e. schools, healthcare, worksites, and community). See sections on *Building a Healthy Community Coalition* and *Recruiting Key Members* in the Toolkit for more information.

5. **Documentation and ongoing feedback on programs.** It's also very important that people keep a record of what they have done and how they have done it. Having this history can be an invaluable guide for the organization's work. Looking regularly (at least quarterly) at what the group has done, how quickly it has occurred, and outside events that affect the group's work has been shown to spur groups onto even greater heights. See sections on *Coalition First Meeting Guidelines* and *Coalition Meeting Agenda Template* in the Toolkit for more suggestions and examples.

6. **Technical assistance and support.** Outside help with specific tasks, such as action planning or securing resources, is also a way to support a group's efforts to transform its community.

> **THE HEALTH OF A COMMUNITY IS OFTEN INFLUENCED BY THE NEIGHBORHOOD, THE SCHOOLS THEY ATTEND, THE AVAILABILITY OF HEALTHY FOODS, AND THE OPPORTUNITIES THEY HAVE FOR EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING, AND EDUCATION.**
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> *RWJF, Commission to Build a Healthier America[2]*

CONCLUSION

Community health, the well-being of the people who share a common place or experience, in order to support health improvement, requires changes in both the behaviors of large numbers of individuals and in the conditions that affect their health. Although community members are best positioned to determine their concerns and strategies and influence outcomes, partners are needed to provide technical support, for obtaining financial assistance, and project recognition.

The tools and resources in the Toolkit are designed to assist communities in recruiting essential stakeholders from all sectors in the community. Collaboration with these stakeholders and partners to support community change, address common goals, and build the capacity of community members is necessary to address health priorities and initiate sustainable change.

Resources

Refer to the following resources for further information about understanding and determining key factors for community change.

Key Factors for Community Change
Theory of Change: A Practical Tool for Action, Results, and Learning. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps.
Principles of Community Engagement. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Building Capacity for Community and Systems Change. The Community Toolbox, University of Kansas.
Community Engagement and Participation Outline. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
THRIVE - Tool for Health and Resilience in Vulnerable Environments. Prevention Institute

References

1. Fawcett, S. F., Francisco, V.T., Paine-Andrews, A., Schultz, J, & Nagy, J. (2013). Chapter 1. Our Model for Community Change and Improvement, Section 7. Working Together for Healthier Communities: A Framework for Collaboration Among Community Partnerships, Support Organizations, and Funders. In *The Community Toolbox, University of Kansas*. Retrieved from http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/sub_section_main_1381.aspx
2. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Commission to Build a Healthier America (2008, September). *Where We Live Matters for Our Health* (Issue Brief 3). San Francisco: Cubbin, C., Pedregon, V., Egerter, S., & Braveman, P. Retrieved from http://www.commissiononhealth.org/PDF/888f4a18-eb90-45be-a2f8-159e84a55a4c/Issue%20Brief%203%20Sept%2008%20-%20Neighborhoods%20and%20Health.pdf