



Champions for Change:

Health Net and the Los Angeles Collaborative

The mission of the California Medical Association (CMA) Foundation is to improve community health through a partnership of leaders in medicine, related health professions, and the community. In all of our projects, including the obesity prevention project, we work with organizations committed to improving health through collaboration and action. The CMA Foundation is proud to highlight the unique and effective partnership of Health Net and the Los Angeles Collaborative for Healthy, Active Children. Their work together is a prime example of what can be accomplished when a health care organization and community collaborative come together around a common cause.

In response to Los Angeles County's growing childhood obesity epidemic, the Los Angeles Collaborative for Healthy Active Children (LA Collaborative) was formed to encourage healthy eating and physical activity among underserved residents and to create innovative partnerships to help curb the rise of unfit, overweight children.

The LA Collaborative is a public-private partnership of organizations assembled by the Network for a Healthy California's Los Angeles Region. The vision of the collaborative is to have "children and families in Los Angeles County who are physically active, eat healthy foods, and live in communities where policies and environments promote healthy lifestyles." The LA Collaborative's members represent more than 100 organizations from the public and private sectors that share resources and promote change in the battle against childhood obesity. Health Net, one of California's largest health plans, joined the LA Collaborative to represent

the health care industry and participate in resource sharing to promote healthy eating and physical activity among the county's low-income residents. Health Net's organizational commitment to addressing the obesity epidemic has led to a successful partnership with the LA Collaborative for more than three years.

LA Collaborative Partners

- School Districts
- Health Care Providers
- Head Start Providers
- Community Based Organizations
- County of Los Angeles Department of Health
- City and County of Los Angeles Parks and Recreation
- Faith Based Organizations
- Los Angeles Nutrition Network
- 5 a Day Campaigns
- American Heart Association
- American Diabetes Association
- American Cancer Society
- Dairy Council of California
- California Food Policy Advocates

History and Development

The Network for a Healthy California (Network) formed in 1996 through funding provided by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Stamp Nutrition Education program. The mission of the Network is "to create innovative partnerships so that low-income Californians are enabled to adopt healthy eating and physical activity patterns as part of a healthy lifestyle." The Network employs a broad-based social marketing campaign as a means of achieving its mission and is divided into eleven regional networks which provide services

to all counties in the state of California.

The Network is a statewide social marketing initiative led by the California Department of Public Health's Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section. Its primary focus is to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables to the recommended levels in the United States Dietary Guidelines for Americans. In addition, the network promotes increasing physical activity to at least 30 minutes a day for adults and 60 minutes a day for children, as well as striving to reduce hunger and food insecurity by promoting the Food Stamp program to eligible Californians. These nutrition and physical activity behavioral objectives are designed to reduce the risks of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases, especially cancer, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

In 2003, Health Net joined a convening, organized by the Network's Los Angeles Regional Network, of nearly 150 representatives to determine the best way to form the LA Collaborative. Participants came from a variety of organizations that reflected the diverse geographic, ethnic, and cultural communities of the county.

The LA Collaborative's leadership is comprised of a 10 member Coordinating Committee that is elected from the general membership to promote the growth, development, and sustainability of the collaborative. The Coordinating Committee established sub-groups to work on issues specific to youth, media, and community development. Health Net serves on the youth sub-group that organizes youth empowerment trainings within Los Angeles County. Anita Keneipp, a Senior Health Education Specialist at Health Net, is the only health plan representative on the Coordinating Committee.

Current Activities

In addition to serving on the Coordinating Committee, Health Net has been active in creating and supporting the educational campaigns of the LA Collaborative. The first media campaign of the LA Collaborative stressed the importance of a healthy breakfast for kids.

The LA Collaborative worked with advertisers to get billboard placement in low-income areas of the county and provided posters and brochures to Collaborative members for use in their organizations. Health Net capitalized on their partnership with the LA Collaborative by using the materials and messages developed for the Healthy Breakfast campaign in their member newsletters distributed to Medi-Cal Managed Care members.

Health Net has participated in several other activities of the LA Collaborative including support and sponsorship of the youth sub-group, meeting planning, facilitating discussions, and reviewing mini-grant applications. Through these activities, Health Net and the LA Collaborative are making a difference in the battle against childhood obesity.

Results

Overall, the partnership between Health Net and the LA Collaborative has proven to be mutually beneficial in providing networking opportunities and developing additional partnerships. Because Health Net and the LA Collaborative serve similar residents of the Los Angeles region, they have been able to provide a powerful, coordinated impact on the health of Los Angeles residents. Through a memorandum of understanding with Latino 5 a Day, Health Net has been able to share culturally appropriate nutrition education materials with their beneficiaries. Latino 5 a Day has also been a great resource for recruiting participants for Health Net's Medi-Cal Community Advisory Committees. The participation of beneficiaries in the Medi-Cal Community Advisory Committee meetings allows community leaders to express what health services their clients deem important and allows an opportunity for Health Net to offer such services.

The LA Collaborative has also benefited from Health Net's participation in the youth sub-group and Coordinating Committee in many ways. For example, Health Net has been able to offer financial and technical support to the Photovoice

Project. This initiative engages youth in photographing their community's nutritional and physical activity environments to demonstrate the challenges that exist to local decision makers. This project presents a unique opportunity to decision makers to present them with opportunities for improvement among their constituent base. In addition, the health education knowledge and expertise of the Health Net staff has been beneficial in shaping the direction of the LA Collaborative as a whole. Health Net has also been able to integrate the vital messages of the LA Collaborative's 5 a Day campaigns into its members' communications to broaden the audience that they currently reach.

Lessons Learned

Health Net has learned several important lessons that can help future partnerships between health plans and other healthcare organizations and their local Regional Network.

Show commitment to the issue.

The organizations and individuals involved in collaboratives are passionate about improving the health and nutrition of their communities. Health plans and other healthcare organizations must demonstrate their long-term commitment to this mission as well. Joining an assemblage like the LA Collaborative is a unique opportunity to form partnerships with various organizations that might otherwise miss out on these opportunities.

Working with a collaborative requires patience.

Collaboratives are often comprised of dozens of organizations that fill unique niches in health and nutrition. The organizations involved may have competing priorities and timelines that must be accounted for in any decisions made by the collaborative group. Members of the group must be willing to compromise to ensure the success of the collaborative.

Make your presence known.

Attending face-to-face meetings and taking an active role in the collaborative is a great way to achieve mutually beneficial results. Often, health plans and other healthcare organizations will be an outlier among the collaborative – schools, nutritionists,

and community advocates are the traditional partners in these groups. Health-related organizations have a lot to offer to these groups and a lot to learn as well, so active and consistent participation is critical to the long-term success of the partnership.

Associating with unfunded partners.

The LA Collaborative benefits by partnering with an organization with unrestricted funding. Unfunded partners are able to help the Collaborative by speaking more freely about issues affecting low-income residents.

It is better to not duplicate efforts.

Because of their partnership with the LA Collaborative, Health Net was able to identify a variety of resources to which providers could refer their Medi-Cal patients. Many of the resources discovered through the LA Collaborative were particularly helpful to Health Net's Spanish-speaking members in a variety of communities in Los Angeles.

Get positive exposure for your organization.

Being connected with an influential community organization like the LA Collaborative has been a great way for Health Net to get exposure in the community while also benefiting from the partnership.

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