

## **CUMULATIVE CHANGE FOR HEALTH THROUGH ACHIEVE: Eastern Highlands Health District**

### **Public Health Issue**

- Chronic disease is a growing public health concern because of its impact on community health and the significant costs for health care related to controlling and managing these diseases.
- Many chronic diseases are caused by modifiable risk factors such as a lack of physical activity, poor food choices, obesity, and tobacco use.
- Active community coalitions can facilitate change in the local health environment and in local policies to increase opportunities for physical activity and healthy food access – demonstrated to be an effective way to improve health and reduce chronic disease.

### **Intervention**

- The Action Communities for Health, Innovation and Environmental Change initiative (ACHIEVE), applies a community model using health departments and local organizations as trusted conveners and community coaches. The National Association of Chronic Disease Directors awarded an ACHIEVE grant and provides technical assistance to the Eastern Highlands Health District in Connecticut using funding provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- The Eastern Highlands Health District provides local public health services to ten towns in Eastern Connecticut. Local community key informants were tapped to form a Community Health Action Response Team and members were trained on the use of the ACHIEVE model at an Action Institute. Resources developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, such as the CHANGE Tool, were used to assess the community & identify areas for change which the team is actively pursuing.

### **Impact**

- The most important impact in this community is that key decision makers are now looking at ways to improve the community and health outcomes using the ACHIEVE approach of policy, systems, and environmental change based on best practices.
- Among the changes in policy and environment to date:
  - The Mansfield BOE established a pre-kindergarten healthy snack policy and put the issue of sugar-sweetened milk on the agenda as a recommended obesity-prevention strategy.
  - The Tolland BOE adopted a lactation protocol to accommodate lactating women during the work day.
  - The Town of Coventry Parks and Recreation Department implemented a healthy snack policy and developed a protocol for enhanced opportunities for active living.
  - Three of the largest member towns are reviewing planning regulations related to open space, paths, and sidewalks to improve opportunities for active living.
  - The Eastern Highlands Health District is changing the temporary food permit application to encourage 50% healthy choices (such as water, fruits and whole grains) on event menus.

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