



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Allegheny County Strengthens Partnerships to Make Progress Toward Local Impact

In this Story from the Field, partners in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, used the CHOICES framework and tools to engage partners in identifying and prioritizing strategic opportunities for action to promote healthy weight for children in their community.

Identifying Priorities in Allegheny County, PA

The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) engaged community members and public health partners through the [Mobilization for Action through Planning and Partnerships \(MAPP\)](#) process to help prioritize their planning efforts. The ACHD identified reducing obesity among school-aged children as a key objective to improve chronic disease risk factors – a priority area identified in their [Community Health Improvement Plan](#).

Strategic Alignment to Promote Child Health

The ACHD leveraged funds to support capacity building and infrastructure to establish the [Healthy Kids Allegheny Task Force](#). This task force brought together partners with a multi-sectoral, collaborative focus on children's health and wellness.

The task force looked to identify strategies to effectively reduce childhood obesity and to ensure their resources were being invested responsibly. They also were looking for ways to advance the strategic priorities of *Live Well Allegheny* – a county-wide campaign to improve the overall health and wellness of Allegheny County residents.



Engaging Partners to Create Evidence for Action

The ACHD teamed up with the Childhood Obesity Intervention Cost-Effectiveness Study (CHOICES) Project through its Learning Collaborative Partnership program. In this program, the CHOICES Project works with health agencies to create new, local evidence to inform decision-making. The ACHD team saw an opportunity to identify strategies to promote child health and learned how to use local data and apply cost-effectiveness analysis methods to prioritize effective strategies to reduce childhood obesity in Allegheny County. To identify relevant strategies, the ACHD team assembled a group of key partners:

- ✓ the Healthy Kids Allegheny Task Force
- ✓ Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time
- ✓ Healthy Out-of-School Time
- ✓ the United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania
- ✓ Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh
- ✓ *Live Well Allegheny Schools and Community Partners*

Evaluating Opportunities to Address Key Priorities

ACHD identified partners early in the process. This facilitated engagement in the selection of school and afterschool settings as key areas for collaboration. The ACHD CHOICES team opted to focus on Active Physical Education in schools and a Healthy Snack Policy in afterschool programs from the CHOICES menu of strategies with strong evidence for impact on health and data on cost-effectiveness.

Then, the team used [CHOICES tools](#) to identify the activities and resources needed to put these strategies into action, considered the interests of partners, and discussed what would be feasible to implement. These tools helped the team answer several key questions for planning:

1. **What is the strategy?**
2. **Where is it implemented?**
3. **Which populations are impacted?**
4. **Who will be involved in implementing the strategy?**
5. **What is the status of this strategy in your state, county, or city?**

Lessons Learned

The ACHD CHOICES team engaged partners to establish what would need to happen to implement their chosen strategies, who would need to be involved, and what impact these strategies would have in their community. These efforts enabled them to identify feasible implementation plans that are projected to make an impact on health. Using CHOICES tools and resources, the ACHD CHOICES team and partners developed evidence they could use to make a case for investing in these efforts to promote a healthy weight.

Active Physical Education in Schools

A policy requiring provision of 50% moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in physical education classes.

SEE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ACTIVE PE WAS IMPLEMENTED IN SCHOOLS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Healthy Snack Policy in Afterschool Programs

A policy that sets nutrition standards to ensure that all food and beverages available in programs meet national standards to support good nutrition.

SEE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF A HEALTHY SNACK POLICY WAS IMPLEMENTED IN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY.

“Partnering with the CHOICES Team equipped the ACHD Team with a clear understanding of what it would take to implement the strategies that we modeled, and a very specific guide for doing so. Strategic alignment of our partners and the evidence from this work with CHOICES helped us to have more informed conversations with decision-makers.”

– Hannah E. Hardy, Director, Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention Program, Allegheny County Health Department

TOOLS & RESOURCES

State and local leaders need to identify strategies that are shown to be effective at reducing obesity and can be implemented in a local context. Tools and resources that can help:

- [CHOICES Map of state & local efforts](#)
 - [CHOICES Childhood Obesity National Action Kit](#)
 - [The future of childhood obesity in the United States](#)
 - [CHOICES-Allegheny County Healthy Snack Policy issue brief](#)
 - [CHOICES-Allegheny County Active PE issue brief](#)
 - [Live Well Allegheny website](#)
- [Join the CHOICES Community of Practice to access tools & resources and connect with others in the field!](#)



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Hannah E. Hardy, MPA
Director, Chronic Disease & Injury Prevention Program
Allegheny County Health Department
Pittsburgh, PA
(412) 247-7946 | Hannah.Hardy@AlleghenyCounty.US

The CHOICES Project
choicesproject@hsph.harvard.edu

SUGGESTED CITATION

CHOICES Stories from the Field: Allegheny County Strengthens Partnerships to Make Progress Toward Local Impact. Allegheny County Health Department, Pittsburgh, PA, and the CHOICES Project Team at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA; June 2021. For more information, please visit www.choicesproject.org

FUNDING

This work has been supported by The JPB Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U48DP006376). This story from the field is intended for education use only. The findings and conclusions are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or other funders.

©2015 President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved. The CHOICES name, acronym, and logo are marks of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.