

Maine Tobacco Prevention Success Story

Steps Toward Reaching The Immigrant And Minority Communities Through Tobacco Prevention With Community Organization

At A Glance:

In an effort to serve the community in its entirety, the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program recognizes the health disparities facing minority communities within Cumberland County, and tries to find new ways to serve these communities through collaboration, education, and policy work.

Public Health Challenge:

The use of any tobacco product has an impact on the health of the individual and those around them, however due to a variety of factors, some people may be disproportionately affected and therefore at a higher risk of health effects. The different factors that may affect someone's level of risk could be race/ethnicity, education, and socioeconomic status. Minority groups within our community are easily affected by multiple, if not all, of these factors as a result of systemic inequality. Dr. Monica Webb Hooper states through her research around tobacco use and health disparities, "The general failure to recognize the non-additive disadvantage experienced among individuals with intersecting social positions, or intersectionality, also contributes to health disparities." This highlights the significance of serving all populations within our community, especially the high risk populations. In Cumberland County, there are 8.44% non-white racial/ethnic minorities, and in the City of Portland there are 16.11% of non-white racial/ethnic minorities. Reaching these communities is an integral part to tobacco prevention in our county.

Approach:

The City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program recognizes the health disparities within our community and looks to find ways to promote health equity and serve the minority and high risk populations in our communities. Serving the most diverse county in Maine, this became an important aspect of the work the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program was committing to serving. The District Tobacco Prevention Partners constantly look for organizations that focus on working with minority communities in the region. Through collaboration, and serving as a resource for these organizations, City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program will be able to serve those communities more adequately.

With the intent of educating these communities about the harmful effects of tobacco use, second and third hand smoke effects, and sharing resources, the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program has looked into holding culturally competent events with interpreters for the communities we are reaching at the time. The City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program also wanted to reach parents to discuss youth use of these products as well. In addition to these adult-facing presentations and resources, the City of Portland's Tobacco Prevention Program wanted to reach youth within these communities to be able to focus on and connect with these young people and, more specifically, to be able to meet their needs.

"Hawa and her team at Portland's Public Health Division have been so great to work with. They have been highly supportive and flexible from the moment we first met. As a team, they brought their expertise to the work we do at Gateway in order to use their skills, experience and commitment to advancing public health in a way that complimented the work we were doing. Not only have they offered to help support the development of our tobacco policy, the Public Health Division team has also been helpful in crafting youth-centered activities that encourage engagement on public health issues in a creative and exciting way, especially in the midst of a pandemic. We are grateful for their time, commitment and partnership."

- Kate Fahey, Gateway Community Services Maine, Director of Programs

Pictured: Youth at Gateway Community Services, fall 2019.



Results:

The City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program has been working diligently with Gateway Community Services since January 2020. Gateway Community Services is a nonprofit organization that works with New Mainers and immigrant communities. They aim to support and aid youth and adults to better their mental and emotional health with culturally competent services. Hawa Shir looked to collaborate with Gateway Community Services and worked with them on fitting tobacco prevention efforts into their work with the community. Gateway Community Services was interested in updating their tobacco policy, especially since they host many events with the community. After a few months of working from home, Gateway Community Services was able to update their policy language.

Gateway Community Services was also interested in educational resources about ENDS and substance use for the community as well. The City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program and Substance Use Prevention Program collaborated with Gateway Community Services to plan a community dialogue and educational presentation regarding these issues facing minority communities. All programs looked forward to hearing from the community on how they and their community members face these issues around tobacco and other substance use, and how they think professionals in their respective fields can help them. Different events would be held with different parts of the community, with an interpreter at each event. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 this event was postponed until it is safe to have in-person events again, as Gateway Community Services finds that non-English speaking communities find it hard to access events virtually.

Another goal the City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program hoped to achieve through collaboration with Gateway Community Services was to reach youth through programs that are created to serve and empower youth who are minorities in our community. The City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program was planning on hosting Sidekicks and other youth workshops through Gateway Community Services, but these were also postponed due to COVID-19 prevention restrictions; however these events are more likely to transition to virtual workshops in the near future. Sidekicks is a program that trains young people and adult advisors in Maine to help teens find the words to talk to their peers about tobacco use and vaping.



Picture provided by Gateway Community Services, fall 2019.



Sustaining Success:

Although many events were postponed due to precautions around COVID-19 prevention, the City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program looks forward to hosting these events in person when it is safe to do so in the future. In addition to rescheduling events, the City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program is working with Gateway Community Services to transform some events into virtual events and trainings. The ideas of virtual Sidekicks advisor trainings, Sidekicks youth trainings, and a virtual jeopardy game night have been discussed for continuing youth involvement while social distancing. Even though our educational presentations involving interpreters have been cancelled, the City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program has been working on translating many tobacco-related resources for non-English speaking members of our communities. These resources include information on second and third hand smoke effects, effects from smoking hookah, effects from smoking e-cigarettes, and data around youth use of ENDS products (2019 MIYHS). These resources will be widely distributed to reach the appropriate communities once they are formatted with proper translations. Gateway Community Services also looks forward to enforcing their newly updated tobacco policy with help from City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program. The City of Portland’s Tobacco Prevention Program looks forward to continuing this collaboration with Gateway Community Services and also finding new and effective ways of reaching all parts of our community in Cumberland County in our tobacco prevention efforts.

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