Best practices in nutrition education for low-income adult and youth audiences

Charge
To identify best practices in nutrition education for low-income audiences.

Approach
Within SNAP-Ed, direct delivery has been a “hallmark” of both previous and current nutrition education efforts (1). Direct delivery is perhaps the most time and resource intensive method for delivering nutrition education. Consequently, in identifying best practices, this project focused on direct delivery with consideration of how this type of education should work collaboratively with policy, systems, and environmental supports to help participants make healthier lifestyle changes for themselves and their families.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA, provided copies of all SNAP-Ed State Plans and Year-End Reports from FY2012, which were used to gain insight on common programmatic plans and activities. Data from the plans and reports were entered into spreadsheets and then analyzed to identify approaches to delivering nutrition education and potential case studies for later follow-up. A literature review provided additional guidance on best practices.

An expert panel was created and charged with identifying best practices for nutrition education with low-income audiences. Seven panel members were chosen based on their experience with nutrition education of low-income populations as program leaders, program implementers, and researchers at land-grant universities, other universities, and public-health organizations. Experience with both adult and youth audiences and content expertise in nutrition, physical activity, food resource management, food safety, and educational methodologies were considered.

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Expert Panel:
Alice Ammerman, DrPH, RD, Gail Hanula, PhD, RD, LD, Barbara Lohse, PhD, RD, LDN, Marci Scott, PhD, RD, Elena Serrano, PhD, Easter Tucker, MS, Mary Kay Wardlaw, PhD

Case Studies
Once consensus was reached, keywords from the best practices were used to search the spreadsheets for SNAP-Ed programs that potentially exemplified one or more best practices. In selecting these programs, care was taken to include programs from all FNS regions and include variability in delivery channel (direct, indirect, and social marketing), target audience (adult, youth, and older adult), and a range of FY2012 funding allocations. Programs chosen as case studies exemplified specific best practices and were limited to SNAP-Ed as only SNAP-Ed programs were included in the secondary data analysis. In addition, project researchers ensured aspects of the program exemplifying best practices continued in 2014. SNAP-Ed programs associated with project researchers and expert panel members were excluded. Nine case studies have been completed thus far, at project completion, case studies will accompany all five best practice domains.

Recommendations for Use of Best Practices
- Use best practices to self-assess program strengths and limitations
- Include behavior change theory and research-based content in program design
- Develop and deliver curricula and materials appropriate to specific target audience
- Ensure fidelity in program delivery, educator training, and data collection/evaluation
- Link evaluation to program design, program delivery, and educator training

References