

Policies that affect agricultural worker health: Findings from policy stakeholder surveys

American Public Health Association Meeting
November 5, 2007
Washington, DC



Acknowledgements

- **The California Endowment**
 - Agricultural Workers Health Initiative
- **Abundantia Consulting**



Background

- Pilot demonstration grants to two communities in California to participate in TCE's Poder Popular Program
 - Three year project designed to improve health for agricultural workers, their families and their communities.
 - Builds capacity to develop community-directed strategies and focuses on population health, community health, and systems change.

Background

- Long-term outcomes include:
 - local and state policy changes in housing, air and water quality and land use
 - supporting binational healthcare strategies
 - involving agribusiness in creating and sustaining healthy communities.

Purpose and research questions

- **Purpose:** To highlight opportunities, efforts, and outcomes related to systems change for key policy areas and any links that existed between these strategies and the work of local communities.
- **Research areas:**
 - identifying priority policies, policy strategies, and policy solutions that affect agricultural worker health
 - engagement in advocacy and policy agendas
 - impact of policy strategies/policies on agricultural worker health
 - successes and challenges in policy work
 - policymakers interested in strategic partner policy work

Methods

- An original survey instrument was developed for conducting the interviews.
- Telephone stakeholder interviews
- 15 strategic partner organizations
- Surveys conducted in Summer 2006

Key Findings

Key Findings: Priority Policy Issues

- Environmental health
- Health insurance coverage and access
- Cultural competency among health workers
- Poor or unsafe working conditions
- Inadequate or unaffordable housing

Key findings: Policy solutions and strategies

- Organizing and empowering communities and emerging leaders to speak for themselves and influence policy
- Increasing government involvement in the community or electing leaders more responsive to agricultural workers
- Expanding health coverage and affordability
- Ensuring more culturally competent health care
- Mitigating or eliminating the use of pesticides
- Adopting policies around working conditions and workers compensation/salary

Key findings: Immigration and policy issues

- Growing fear among undocumented workers of immigration officials and of the possibility of being deported kept them from coming forward to advocate for policy changes and seek out health care services.
- Trust levels between agricultural workers and service providers have decreased.

“We are trying to respond to the needs of the community, but current conditions are causing the gap between people and services to widen...workers are complaining less about exploitations, harassment, and violence. There is much fear there.” – *Stakeholder respondent*

Key findings: Changes in local policies/standards of practice

- Cultural competency standards for healthcare providers
- Pesticide policy development and implementation
- Healthcare clinical practices
- Internal programming standards of practice

Key findings: Information for policymakers

- Foster direct relationships between policymakers and agricultural workers.

“When the communities speak out, when it comes directly from them, that’s when policymakers really listen.” – *Stakeholder*

- Provide information on how working conditions negatively contribute to agricultural worker health.

“Policy makers want numbers to prove that agricultural workers really suffer disproportionately to the rest of the population.”

- *Stakeholder respondent*

- Provide a cost-benefit analysis on agricultural worker contributions to the economy.

Key findings: Challenges to conducting policy work

- Lack of public education about worker contributions to the economy and agricultural worker health
- Difficulty in engaging local agricultural workers in policy work
- Resource/technology barriers

Conclusions

A number of suggested policy strategies may be relevant to local communities engaged in improving agricultural worker health:

- Building community capacity to dialogue directly with policymakers
- Working to elect community leaders more responsive to agricultural worker issues
- Educating agricultural workers on health services available in the community

Recommendations

- Educate and inform local and state level policymakers on the health issues and working conditions.
- Create avenues for advocates and agricultural workers to share experiences with regional leaders and policymakers.
- Provide communications training and resources for grassroots organizations to be able to have the technology, knowledge and funding to conduct policy work.

For more information

Zoe Cardoza Clayson, ScD

Abundantia Consulting

155 Montgomery St., Suite 201

San Francisco, CA 94104

415-359-9671 www.abundantia.net



Maria Boyle, MS, RD
Samuels & Associates
1222 Preservation Park Way
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 271-6799

maria@samuelsandassociates.com

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