

Hennepin County Public Health Department Promoting Mental Well-Being Assessment Executive Summary

Background

In 2013, Hennepin County Public Health Department, Minneapolis Health Department and Bloomington Public Health were partners in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-funded Community Transformation Grant. Goals for this CDC project were to:

- Create social and physical environments that support healthy living and healthy choices.
- Avoid chronic diseases by enabling people to make healthy choices.
- Reduce health disparities.
- Control health-care spending.

One expected outcome of the Community Transformation Grant was *improved mental well-being of the populations served*. However, the CDC provided neither a definition of “mental well-being” nor guidance about how to promote it. This assessment was undertaken to:

- Describe the contribution of positive mental well-being in preventing chronic disease.
- Describe the factors that affect mental well-being.
- Recommend strategies to address those factors at policy, systems and environmental levels.

Elements of the assessment included:

- A review of current scientific literature about mental well-being, its relationship to chronic disease and its presence across the lifespan in populations of interest.
- Interviews with community, academic, topic and government thought leaders about mental well-being.
- Identification of best practices/promising approaches to improving mental well-being through policies, systems and environments.
- Identification of local data related to mental well-being status.

Population groups on which the project focused originally included:

- African American
- American Indian
- Recent immigrants (West African, East African, Latino)
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT)
- Low-income

After the early conclusion of the Community Transformation Grant by the CDC in 2014, the Hennepin County Public Health Department extended the assessment to include additional county population groups:

- Asian Indian
- Chinese
- Hmong
- Vietnamese.

Findings

Literature Review

The strongest theme to emerge from the literature centered on life stress and its negative impact over time on physical health. Two main routes emerged for addressing negative interactions with stress: managing the response to stress at an individual level and addressing the social conditions that lead to it. Numerous evidence-based strategies are reviewed.

Interviews

The interviews yielded rich information about how various population groups understand the concept of mental well-being, and what might be done to improve it. Suggestions ranged from choosing what language to use in discussing these issues to how systems might better collaborate to ensure appropriate support for those with severe and persistent mental illness. Academic and government thought leaders shared insights about what they see working, and areas for greater investment.

Best Practices/Promising Approaches

A review of best practices/promising approaches documents revealed only high-level recommendation about *advancing a public health approach to promoting mental well-being*. There were no suggestions about program-level interventions.

Local Data Sources

Local data sources were identified for review. Characteristics included data that were regularly collected and data sets to which health departments had access.

Recommendations

Recommendations were developed using the following criteria:

- Evidence of impact on mental well-being from the literature
- Evidence of short-term or long-term impact
- Within the scope of the Health Departments' activities
- Potential costs
- Political feasibility
- Ease of carrying out

Four recommendations were made, with several potential strategies suggested under each recommendation:

1. Promote evidence-based stress management methods.
2. Maintain or expand current investments in evidence-based interventions focused on early childhood.
3. Address mental well-being through the core functions of public health.
4. Use the influence of local public health departments.

Follow-Up

Since completing the initial assessment in 2013, findings have been shared with the following groups:

- Hennepin County Community Transformation Grant Leadership Team
- Hennepin County Public Health Department
- Minneapolis Health Department
- Bloomington Public Health
- Hennepin County Social Connectedness Action Team
- Hennepin County Promoting Mental Well-Being Planning Retreat
- Tri-City Partners for Healthy Youth and Communities
- Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Statewide Health Improvement Initiatives
- Hennepin County Accountable Communities for Health
- Hennepin County Leadership Forum

Hennepin County Public Health set up workgroups to move recommendations forward.

The City of Minneapolis Health Department advocated for shifts to state funding to include stress-reduction strategies as a worksite health promotion strategies, and is piloting a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction class for employees.

Contact Information

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