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Healthy People 2020: Social Work Values in a Public Health Roadmap

Background

Since 1979, *Healthy People* has functioned as the public health roadmap for the nation. A comprehensive set of national 10-year health objectives, *Healthy People* serves as a foundation for prevention and wellness activities for the federal government, states and communities, as well as many public and private sector agencies and organizations throughout the U.S. A fluid document that has evolved as the nation's public health priorities have changed, *Healthy People* undergoes an extensive stakeholder feedback process with each new iteration. More than 8,000 comments (including those from NASW) were considered in the drafting of the *Healthy People 2020* objectives, which were released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in December 2010.

What's New in *Healthy People 2020*?

Thirteen new topic areas were added to *Healthy People 2020*, including Older Adults; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Health; Adolescent Health; Global Health;

Preparedness; and Dementias, including Alzheimer's disease. The framework also underscores a continued focus on population disparities, including those categorized by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, disability status, sexual orientation, and geographic location.

Social Determinants Approach to Health

Significant for the social work community is the new social determinants approach that *Healthy People 2020* takes in framing the national health objectives. The concept of determinants describes how the conditions in which one lives and works, such as physical and social environments and access to health services, as well as individual behavior and biology, can have an enormous impact on health.

A Social Work Perspective

Eva Moya, PhD, LMSW, professor at the University of Texas and the only social worker on the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, which was tasked with developing with *Healthy People 2020* objectives, sees social work values embedded in the *Healthy People* initiative. "*Healthy People 2020*, similar to the

Overarching Healthy People 2020 Goals

- Attain high-quality, longer lives free of preventable disease, disability, injury, and premature death.
- Achieve health equity, eliminate disparities, and improve the health of all groups.
- Create social and physical environments that promote good health for all.
- Promote quality of life, healthy development, and healthy behaviors across all life stages.

A Social Determinants Approach

Health and wellbeing are impacted by an individual's:

- Socioeconomic status
- Ethnicity
- Access to health services
- Employment status
- Education
- Social relationships
- Neighborhood/housing conditions
- Personal behaviors

Get to Know Healthy People 2020

Introducing Healthy People 2020: Find out about the history, development and launch of Healthy People 2020.

Read More



Closer Look: Health Disparities

Compare the Top 10 Causes of Death across Populations

Race/Ethnicity:

Age Range:

Get Your Results



How to Use HealthyPeople.gov



Get the Healthy People 2020 brochure

What's New for 2020

Don't miss these new Topic Areas, tools, and more.



Spotlight

Healthy People Implementation Conference: Coming in Spring 2012



social work profession, reflects the understanding that family, social, economic, and environmental factors are primary, interrelated determinants of health and wellbeing across the life-cycle," says Moya. Furthermore, she states, "Healthy People and the social work profession both stress the need to move beyond a focus on controlling disease to addressing factors that are the root causes of disease, disability and continuing health inequity in the United States." (E. Moya, personal communication, Dec. 9, 2010)

How Can Social Workers Use Healthy People 2020?

With its focus on data-driven, life-span objectives, *Healthy People 2020* has the potential to strengthen social work practice, by targeting programs and resources to areas of greatest need. *Healthy People 2020* also offers social workers the opportunity to assume leadership roles in achieving the objectives at the local, state and federal level.

Social workers can:

- Use the objectives to inspire community action by policy and decision makers, professionals and community members at all levels
- Use *Healthy People* objectives to develop research, curricula and programming priorities within their agencies or institutions
- Develop and disseminate best practices, designed to meet the objectives

- Use the *Healthy People 2020* interactive Web site www.healthypeople.gov and promote it as a priority resource for health promotion activities
- Publicize how the social work profession is meeting the objectives, through the *Healthy People* consortium (see Web site)
- Become champions of *Healthy People* and ensure that their states and localities take ownership of the objectives
- Monitor progress on meeting the objectives and sound the alarm when health problems are getting worse, or are not improving fast enough
- Get involved with *Healthy People* efforts in their states or territories, by contacting their *Healthy People 2020* state coordinators: www.healthypeople.gov/2020/consortium/hpConsortium.aspx#toolkit

The *Healthy People 2020* initiative, which includes approximately 600 objectives, 1,300 measures, and implementation guidance, is available on the program Web site www.healthypeople.gov.

References

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2010). *MAP-IT: A Guide to Using Healthy People 2020 in Your Community*. Retrieved from www.healthypeople.gov/2020/implementing/default.aspx

Case Study: A School Social Worker Uses Healthy People 2020 to Addresses Underage Drinking

Using *Healthy People 2020*, the following case study employs the “MAP-IT” framework (**Mobilize, Assess, Plan, Implement, Track**) to design an intervention that addresses a community public health concern, (ODPHP, 2010).

Mobilize

Ms. King, a social worker at a local high school, is responsible for developing a response to a series of underage drinking incidents at school events. These highly publicized incidents resulted in students requiring care at the local hospital emergency room. Ms. King organizes a meeting with the high school principal, and the school board, who decide to add a unit on alcohol use to the school’s curriculum. Ms. King will lead the process of selecting, implementing, and evaluating a new unit on alcohol use.

Assess

As a first step, Ms. King gathers local, county, and state data to better understand the scope of the problem. She looks at the *Healthy People 2020* Web site and finds within the Substance Abuse topic area, **Objective SA-13.1: Reduce the proportion of adolescents reporting use of alcohol or any illicit drugs during the past 30 days**. The national measure for that objective comes from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The national data state that 18.3 percent of adolescents ages 12 to 17 reported use of alcohol or illicit drugs in the past 30 days in 2008. The national goal is to reduce that number to 16.5 percent. Ms. King is able to review the NHSDA data for her state and finds that the state’s baseline is 19 percent. It’s clear to her that underage drinking is a public health priority for her community.

Ms. King and other members of the high school administration hold a series of meetings with students, parents, police, health and social service providers and local business owners to determine the causes of underage alcohol use, especially binge drinking. From these meetings, they find that peer pressure, easy access to alcohol, lack of structured, alcohol-free programming for teens in the community, and a perceived lack of consequences are reported by each group. After gathering this information, the school requests curricula for review

that address the causes of underage alcohol use. In selecting a curriculum, Ms. King speaks with social workers in neighboring high schools about their experiences and makes a decision to review only curricula that are evidence-based.

Plan

Ms. King presents the school board with three curricula that address the causes of alcohol abuse in their community. The school board discusses the pros and cons of each and selects one that best meets their learning objectives, as well as time and budget requirements. Two teachers are selected to teach the course. Ms. King, who will work closely with the teachers, is responsible for developing the evaluation plan.

Implement

The two teachers are sent to a training session on the new curriculum, which includes a pre- and post-test evaluation component. A volunteer student advisory group is formed to give Ms. King and the teachers additional feedback on the curriculum. The group meets periodically to discuss ways to make the course more relevant to their peers.

Track

Ms. King collects attendance records for the course, reviews the student evaluation data, and monitors local police reports for alcohol-related incidents. She also collects informal data, such as teachers’ perceptions of students’ attitudes toward alcohol use and information gleaned from the student advisory group. The first group of students to complete the course report binge drinking less often on their post-test. Ms. King contacts the director of the State Substance Abuse Office to inform her of the school’s efforts. The state health official agrees to stay in touch and to alert her to possible funding opportunities in the future. They also brainstorm other potential funding sources, such as fundraising and partnering with local businesses.

The entire school community knows it will be challenging to keep momentum for this program going, especially if the issue is not in the news and budgets are cut. They hope that because students, parents, and other community members were involved in the assessment process, they will remain committed to offering alcohol abuse prevention education at the high school.

“*Healthy People 2020*, like the social work profession, promotes the understanding that family, social, economic, and environmental factors are primary, interrelated determinants of health and wellbeing across the life-cycle.”

– Eva M. Moya, PhD, LMSW

Member, HHS Secretary’s Advisory Committee on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives for 2020

Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, College of Health Sciences, The University of Texas at El Paso

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