



RACIAL AND ETHNIC APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY HEALTH

"Before, my cholesterol level was close to 400. But after I exercised regularly and ate healthier, my cholesterol level right now is at 160. I am extremely happy with this improvement."

—Cambodian senior in the Lowell Senior Center exercise program

REACHing Cambodian Adults in Lowell, Massachusetts

Who We Are

The Lowell Community Health Center coordinates the Cambodian Community Health 2010 Program (CCH 2010).

- CCH 2010 is a coalition of health care providers, community groups, and representatives from the University of Massachusetts Lowell.
- Our goal is to reduce health disparities in the rates of heart disease and diabetes among Cambodians living in Lowell, Massachusetts.
- Lowell has the second largest Cambodian community in the United States.

The Problem

- In Lowell, Cambodian adults aged 45 years or older have higher death rates from stroke (15.9%) and diabetes (13.4%) compared with all Massachusetts adults in this age group (6.5% for stroke, 2.5% for diabetes).
- In 2002, 65% of Cambodian adults aged 50 years or older reported that their health was fair or poor in a survey conducted by CCH 2010.

- Also in 2002, 77% of Cambodian men said they had smoked 100 cigarettes or more in their lifetime, and 37% were current smokers.
- The survey also found that 99% of Cambodian adults in Lowell were born in Cambodia, and 85% had spent time in a refugee camp. Among adults aged 50 years or older, men received an average 7.2 years of schooling in Cambodia, and women received an average 3.1 years. When they talk with a doctor who does not speak Khmer, their main language, 89% said they wanted an interpreter.

The Solution

- CCH 2010 increases access to the health care system for Cambodians. It also increases participation in

Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) is a community-based public health program funded by CDC to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.

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wellness programs such as peer support groups, exercise classes, and stress management sessions.

- CCH 2010 increases awareness among health care providers and researchers about Cambodian culture, health care beliefs, and health care needs.
- The program also offers educational sessions to teach Cambodians about heart disease and diabetes and to teach those who have these diseases how to manage them better.

Our Achievements

- The number of Cambodian patients accessing health care at Lowell Community Health Center's Metta Health Center increased from 0 in 2000 to more than 4,000 in 2005.
- During September 2003–2006, 901 health and human service professionals attended classes to help them understand Cambodian culture, and 424 people attended presentations on Cambodian culture and health care beliefs and practices.
- Seven local pharmacies agreed to help improve communications with Cambodians about their medications.



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CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION





Mobilizing Community Resources

Lowell Community Health Center; Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association of Greater Lowell; University of Massachusetts Lowell, Center for Family, Work and Community and School of Health and Environment; Visiting Nurse Association of Greater Lowell; City of Lowell Council on Aging; Saint Julie Asian Center; Saints Memorial Medical Center; Lowell General Hospital; Greater Lawrence Family Health Center, Merrimack Valley Area Health Education Center; Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Community Health Promotion; Khmer Health Advocates; Lowell Police Department; Trinity EMS; Lowell Telecommunications; City of Lowell Health Department.

Our Achievements, cont.

- During September 2003–2006, 82 Cambodian health professionals completed a Khmer medical terminology course to improve their ability to recognize and understand definitions and analysis of medical terms, as well as anatomic, diagnostic, operative, and symptomatic terms.
- CCH 2010 helped to change policies related to language accessibility services at the Lowell Community Health Center and local hospitals by developing and implementing an interpreter competency and training program.
- CCH 2010 provided content for 75 one-hour shows for Jivit Thmey, a Khmer-language cable television program.

Our Future

In addition to providing culturally appropriate community wellness and educational programs, CCH 2010 will continue to educate and work with local stakeholders to implement solutions to eliminate health disparities in Lowell's Cambodian community.

Getting the Word Out Locally

- "Deep Wounds Fester From Horror Inflicted by the Khmer Rouge," *The Boston Globe*, April 18, 2006.
- "Conference Touches Upon Cambodian Health Issues," *The Lowell Sun*, September 29, 2005.
- "Seminar Promotes an Understanding of Health Literacy," *The Shuttle*, April 20, 2005.

Generating New and Exciting Science

- "Self-Reported Health Among Cambodians in Lowell, Massachusetts." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 2006;17(2, suppl): 133–145.
- "Smoking Among Cambodian Adults in Lowell, Massachusetts, and Ideas for Promoting Cessation." Presented at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 12, 2005.
- "Bringing Equal Health Outcomes Within REACH." *Minority Nurse* 2003; Fall:27–32.

- "Building on the Strengths of a Cambodian Refugee Community Through Community-Based Outreach." *Health Promotion Practice* 2007 (in press).

Keys to Lasting Change in the Cambodian Community

CCH 2010 interventions are succeeding because we have implemented lasting change in the social service and health care community. We also are continuing to develop and invest in a strong infrastructure that represents the community, is capable of mobilizing prevention efforts, and encourages the development of individuals and groups who can make change.

Other important factors for success are innovative community outreach practices that promote health, help people advocate for their own health, and can sustain communitywide behavior change. By making sure that community members are involved in planning outreach activities, we are helping to improve the health of Cambodians in Lowell.

REACH FOR MORE INFORMATION



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