

Partnership with Head Start Educates Parents and Protects Children from Harms of Tobacco

By: Trena Mitchell

A National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Success Story

Summary

The Community Action Program of Central Arkansas (CAPCA) Head Start Program provides child development assistance to many low-income families across Arkansas. The Arkansas Cancer Coalition (ACC) and CAPCA created the Head Start Tobacco Education and Cessation Initiative to educate Head Start families about the harmful effects of tobacco use. Through the initiative, CAPCA increased its ability to support tobacco cessation and cancer prevention efforts. This partnership strengthened tobacco control policies, improved tracking and assessment of tobacco use, connected parents to cessation services, and informed and empowered the community.

Challenge

In the United States, secondhand smoke exposure contributes to about 41,000 deaths among nonsmoking adults and 400 deaths among infants each year. In 2015, there were 2,620 new lung and bronchus cancer cases and 2,180 lung and bronchus cancer deaths in Arkansas. That same year, smoking among adults in Arkansas was also one of the highest in the United States, at nearly 25%, compared to 17% nationally.



CAPCA's Head Start program provides free child care services to more than 600 low-income families in eight Arkansas counties. Since these families live in rural areas with high poverty rates and low rates of high school graduation, they are at a higher risk for smoking or being exposed to secondhand smoke. By accessing this population through their children, it was easier to reach the people in need.

Solution

The ACC provided a train-the-trainer program for CAPCA staff to strengthen their ability to discuss tobacco use and cessation with Head Start parents. Staff learned how to talk with parents about exposing their children to the dangers of tobacco smoke, and how to connect smokers with cessation services using the Arkansas Tobacco Quitline (ATQ).

In December 2015, CAPCA updated its tobacco policy to prohibit the use of electronic smoking devices and smokeless tobacco by anyone onsite to ensure a smoke-free environment. In 2016, CAPCA started collecting baseline data on parent and guardian tobacco use and cessation attempts using the Head Start Family Smoking Survey.

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). To learn more about the National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/ncccp.



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Results

As a result of the training program, CAPCA staff in each center began talking to parents and guardians about cessation and referring them to the ATQ during Head Start enrollment. Fifteen CAPCA sites covering seven counties in Arkansas became smoke-free, resulting in 807 children now having access to a smoke-free environment.

The Head Start Family Smoking Survey helped staff track tobacco use among parents and created opportunities for continued education and referrals. After 4 months, CAPCA collected 566 responses, which provided important baseline data.

The survey indicated:

- 27% of Head Start parents were tobacco users.
- Only 16% of smoking parents were enrolled in the ATQ.
- 78% of parents pledged to keep their homes and cars smoke-free.

“It’s been so beneficial to have a consistent time set aside to talk to parents about their tobacco usage. We’re able to refer them to resources to help them quit, as well as stress the importance of not smoking around their children. I’m very thankful for the support the ACC provided in implementing this initiative.”

Sarah Harlan
CAPCA Health Coordinator

Future Directions

The Arkansas Head Start Tobacco Education and Cessation Initiative used resources from ACC and CAPCA to increase awareness of the consequences of tobacco use and reduce the risk of cancer among Arkansas families. The initiative empowered CAPCA staff to reduce children’s risk of smoke exposure by addressing their parents’ smoking habits.

CAPCA will use data collected from the Head Start Family Smoking Survey to monitor changes in the percentage of parents who use tobacco, are enrolled in the Quitline, and pledge to keep their homes and cars smoke-free. The data will also identify gaps for further collaborations and interventions that improve the health of Head Start families. ACC has identified a new partner Head Start program, and will use lessons learned through this initiative to guide future efforts to improve tobacco policies, reduce smoking rates, and improve the lives of children and adults in Arkansas.

Your Involvement is Key

The ACC works with Head Start programs to reduce the burden of cancer from tobacco use. Learn more about these and other strategies Arkansas used to improve cancer prevention, detection, and care in the state by visiting the Arkansas Cancer Plan or by joining the Arkansas Cancer Coalition. Visit www.arcancercoalition.org to learn more.

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