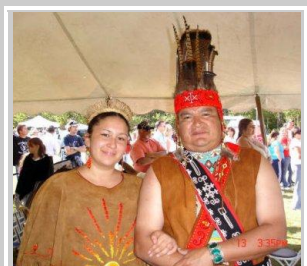




MCD Public Health

Insight Innovation Impact

January 2014



Lauren Stevens, shown here with her father RJ at a Passamaquoddy event, was one of our youth HIV education Champions.

This edition of our newsletter celebrates MCD Public Health's long-standing collaborative relationship with our tribal health partners in Maine. Read on to learn about a groundbreaking demonstration project to increase HIV/AIDS awareness and acceptance among Maine tribal community members, followed by a brief summary of MCD's more recent work with Maine tribes. Then, read about our latest project to increase health equity in Maine: the Community Health Worker Initiative, a partnership with Maine Migrant Health Program funded by Maine's State Innovation Grant (SIM).

- Kate Perkins, Director,
MCD Public Health

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: WABANAKI GENERATIONS

Addressing HIV/AIDS in Tribal Communities

HIV and AIDS in tribal communities can be a hidden problem due to stigma and lack of knowledge. The Wabanaki Generations project (2005-2007) provided HIV/AIDS education and prevention tools to Maine Native Americans through a culturally appropriate intervention program. The project was a collaborative effort involving [MCD Public Health](#), the Wabanaki Mental Health Association (now Wabanaki Health and Wellness), Maine Migrant Health Program and Maine Community AIDS Partnership.

"It was awakening to see the stress level and concern about HIV in the public," a Native Women's HIV community health worker commented, "I didn't realize it until I witnessed the reactions of people after testing. When they come out HIV-negative, I can feel the celebration. A lot of people were worried but had not been tested before our program."

Program Design

Utilizing the matriarchal culture of the Wabanaki tribes as an avenue to introduce healthy behaviors and messages, the program included three core components:

- (1) training ten native women as HIV Champions to foster community acceptance of the initiative,
- (2) individual and group outreach including rapid testing at events or seasonal locations, and
- (3) cultural sensitivity and best practices training with partnering agencies, in partnership with the Maine AIDS Education and Training Center (AIDS ETC).

Between 2005 and 2007 ten native women, referred to as The Champions, provided HIV education and materials to their personal social networks with primary emphasis in the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy communities. They conducted outreach wherever possible through testing, storytelling, testimonials, educational materials, and referrals to other services.

Program Outcomes

The first two years of the project reached over 1,000 individuals with educational information and/or testing. Even more significantly, the project made great strides in reducing the social stigma of HIV. Before the project, there were no women in Maine Indian communities openly living with HIV. One of the Champions went public with her status early on, and then on a weekend in 2007, three HIV+ women came together for the first time. On a broader level, case histories and oral feedback from project participants suggest that Maine Indian women have become more open to HIV education, stigma has gone down, and issue awareness and acceptance among the Native community has increased. The program was subsequently replicated with additional Champions trained and engaged from 2007 through 2009 with emphasis in the Mi'qmaq Tribe and Houlton Band of Maliseet.



Miigam'agan is a Mi'qmaq traditionalist who provided the ongoing mentoring and support for the community-based Champions and conducted extensive outreach, education, and testing services.

Lasting Impact

The grants may have ended, but the Champions continue to live and work in their communities - where they are a continuing resource to friends and neighbors. Two of the "Champions" went on to larger and more public roles. Sharon Paul became a health educator employed by the Eastern Maine AIDS Network. [She was recently recognized by POZ magazine for her leadership.](#) Champion Clarissa Webber went on to become a staff person at the Wabanaki Health District, facilitating communication and cooperation between tribal organizations and the Maine CDC.

Wabanaki Generations: Addressing HIV/AIDS in tribal communities in Maine was funded from 2005-2007 through the GENERATIONS: Strengthening Women and Families Affected by HIV/AIDS initiative with support from Johnson & Johnson and the National AIDS Fund. The replication from 2007-2009 was possible through financial support from The [Bingham Program](#).

Celebrating 15 years of collaboration with Maine's Tribal Communities

MCD's collaborative work to improve public health in Maine's tribal communities goes back a long ways. The recent projects link back to 1999, when we were a convening partner of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Turning Point project in Maine. As part of that statewide initiative and subsequent efforts to modernize Maine's public health infrastructure, we facilitated discussions with the Tribal Health Directors about how their programs and staff did or did not connect with the State of Maine's public health programs.

The public health infrastructure development process involved many people and organizations, eventually culminating in Governor Baldacci's work with the legislature to establish [public health districts](#) throughout Maine in 2009; in 2011, a [tribal health district](#) was created, establishing the mechanism for ongoing collaboration and partnerships among the tribes, state agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

Over the years, MCD has continued to develop more individual and organizational relationships that can help bridge tribal health care, public health programs, and State of Maine sponsored health promotion and disease prevention activities. For example, during the past decade MCD was actively collaborating with tribal health centers and schools to creating and implement youth suicide prevention and post-vention protocols.

Our most visible current role is centered around the continuation of tribal health quality improvement through initiatives such as our [Blood Pressure Master Training](#) and [Community Transformation Grant](#) programs. Additional connections are reflected in our work to improve health equity. We continue to maintain a foundation of tribal engagement that deepens over time and enhances intra-organizational as well as individual relationships. MCD Public Health is excited and proud to see that our past collaborations and impact continue to foster positive change, both in the present and for the future.



Artwork courtesy of Wabanaki Health and Wellness

Introducing the Community Health Worker (CHW) Initiative



From public health infrastructure improvements to new approaches in delivery of care in Maine, MCD Public Health is recognized as an essential partner for public health projects among tribal and minority communities. In our newest endeavor, MCD Public Health, with our partner the [Maine Migrant Health Program](#), is assisting the Maine CDC and Department of Health and Human Services in the development of a standardized Community Health Worker (CHW) training

curriculum and certification program as well as the creation and management of a CHW multi-site pilot project. Part of a recent State Innovation Model (SIM) grant received by the state of Maine, the pilot program will help us collect local cost effectiveness data, an important opportunity to supplement return on investment impact data that is currently documented in places outside of Maine.

What are CHWs?

CHWs are trusted community members that act as the bridge between individuals and healthcare providers to support access to care services in ways that are relevant to the people they are assisting. The CHW model is well-recognized for improving health within marginalized or at-risk populations. For example, the Wabanaki Generations Initiative, highlighted above, used community health workers to share HIV/AIDS education and prevention information with tribal members in culturally appropriate ways. Just last year, the New England Comparative Effectiveness Public Advisory Council (CEPAC) reviewed the role and current evidence on the effectiveness and value of CHWs. [Review the discussion and final report here.](#)

Interested in joining the CHW conversation?

MCD Public Health and our partner the Maine Migrant Health Program are convening health care providers, community members, public health professionals, and other interested parties to guide the Maine Community Health Worker Initiative. The team will work to develop a plan as to how this type of workforce can be appropriately integrated into areas of Maine health care that will benefit from it. The stakeholder meeting has convened twice since its formation and meets on a monthly schedule in Portland and Augusta. The current topic of discussion is defining CHW roles and expectations in a way that's relevant to Maine demographics and can be understood by the people who will use it. The next meeting will be held in February 2014. Contact Barbara Ginley at bginley@mainemigrant.org for time and place.

Career Opportunities

Public Health offers many career opportunities. To see the latest job postings, please visit our friends at the Maine Public Health Association: <http://www.mainepublichealth.org/jobs.php>

Mark Your Calendars!

Blood Pressure Train-the-Trainer Course, Portland

DHHS 1037 Forest Ave Portland, ME 04103
1/30/2014 -1/31/2014



This is an interactive, two full day Blood Pressure Train-the-Trainer program for health care professionals. The course is designed to empower trainers to bring the training back to others within their own organizations.

Contact:
Joanna Stocker
207-622-7566 ext 259
jstocker@mcdph.org

STAY CONNECTED

