

The Northeast Regional Nutrition Education Center of Excellence Update – February 2016

The Northeast Regional Nutrition Education Center of Excellence (NE-RNECE) at Cornell University aims to expand the evidence base that supports effective nutrition education of diverse low-income program participants delivered in conjunction with policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) approaches that make healthy choices easier in order to prevent obesity. The Northeast key initiatives are a signature research program, nationwide training program, and a systematic review of literature. Highlights of these initiatives follow.

Signature Research

The center's signature research program is testing whether nutrition education and public health/PSE approaches delivered together are more effective in improving obesity prevention outcomes than either alone. The five implementation research projects described below currently comprise the center's signature research program. The projects represent different program sizes, urban/rural settings, variation in race, ethnicity, and cultural contexts, target audience and methods of delivery. Two projects are implemented in SNAP-Ed, and three in EFNEP. Three projects are working in urban areas, 1 is suburban, and one is in rural counties with micropolitan areas. Three projects are randomized controlled trials and two have quasi-experimental designs. All projects are underway: data collection instruments have been identified and/or developed; recruitment and baseline data collection is in process or completed; and interventions have begun in all projects.

- 1) **Adopting Healthy Habits in Worksites: Increasing adoption and acceptability of policy, systems, and environmental changes within agencies serving low-income families** is a collaboration between the center and Cornell Cooperative Extension EFNEP programs in Jefferson and Orange counties in New York State. The project aims to assess the effects of combining direct nutrition education with PSE changes in community agencies and day care centers to support healthy habits for employees and agency participants. The nutrition education component is *Healthy Children, Healthy Families: Parents Making a Difference!* The PSE component is worksite environmental and policy changes.
- 2) **Nutrition Ed, Access and Texting (NEAT): Combining the Hartford Mobile Market with e-Marketing**, led by the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford, Connecticut, aims to assess the effects of combining nutrition education with a text messaging campaign, mobile produce markets & vouchers on access, purchase, and intake of fruits and vegetables. The nutrition education component is a SNAP-Ed lesson on MyPlate; the social marketing and PSE component is daily text messages plus produce vouchers.
- 3) **Sustaining a Successful Youth-Leader Program as part of a Multi-Level, Multi-Component Food Environment/Behavioral Intervention**, led by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Maryland, will test a model to train teens to implement nutrition education and participate in

developing wellness policies at Baltimore recreation centers as part of a larger study assessing strategies to improve the local food environment. The nutrition education component is a curriculum for younger youth developed with the University of Maryland SNAP-Ed; the PSE component is youth-leaders participation in wellness policy development in the centers.

- 4) **Transforming Lifestyles: Integrating Direct Nutrition Education with Physical Activity Using the Health Care System Expansion Model**, led by University of Maryland Extension EFNEP, will test the effectiveness of a system change involving engaging primary health care providers in assessing children's physical activity levels and providing information and referrals to local physical activity resources and nutrition education. The nutrition education component is *Eating Smart Being Active* and *Cooking Matters for Kids*; the PSE component is systems change in the safety-net health clinics.
- 5) **Empowering Urban Schoolchildren to Increase Fruit and Vegetable Consumption through EFNEP-enhanced PSE Interventions**, led by the University of Rhode Island EFNEP, will test the effectiveness of an intervention to engage fifth-grade students in activities to change the school food environment such as conducting an environmental scan, writing letters to the school wellness committee and testing recipes to incorporate into the school's menu. The nutrition education component is the *Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program*; the PSE component is students' engagement with school wellness committee and food service staff to change the school menu.

Nationwide Training Program

NE-RNECE is leading the development of a nationwide training on planning, implementation, and evaluation of PSE change activities delivered through SNAP-Ed and EFNEP. Training will include information on ecological approaches that include PSE efforts and the integration of direct nutrition education. The competency-based online training will be delivered through the existing Cornell NutritionWorks online platform, which provides professional development and continuing education credit certification for nutrition and health professionals. A nationwide training workgroup has been formed with representatives from all RNECEs. This workgroup has developed a survey, which will be sent to the target audience soon, to determine priorities and content for the online training. Center staff and the training workgroup are working closely with the new PSE Change RNECE at the University of Tennessee to coordinate needs assessment and training development efforts.



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Systematic Review



The center is conducting a systematic review to address the question: Does the combination of direct nutrition education with changes to the food and/or physical activity environment have greater effect on obesity-related outcomes than either of the strategies alone? Preliminary planning for the systematic review is complete and development of the protocol is underway.