

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Promoting policy and environmental change in faith-based organizations: Organizational level findings from a mini-grants program

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Background: High rates of heart disease, cancer, and stroke exist in rural South Georgia, where Emory's Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network provided mini-grants and technical assistance to six faith-based organizations to implement policy and environmental changes to promote healthy eating (HE), physical activity (PA), and tobacco use prevention (TUP). Drawing from a Social Ecological Framework, we hypothesized that church members would perceive an increase in messages, programs, and the availability of facilities to support HE, PA, and TUP over a 1-year period.

Methods: Members (N=258) completed self-administered questionnaires that assessed perceptions of the existing church health promotion environment relative to HE, PA, and TUP policies, as well as their eating behavior and intention to use PA facilities at church at baseline and 1-year follow-up.

Results: Members at three of the six churches perceived increases in delivery of HE messages via sermons, church bulletins, and food labels, and increased availability of programs that support HE ($p<0.05$). Members at four churches reported increases in healthy foods served and decreased unhealthy foods served at three churches over the 1-year period ($p<0.05$). Of the five churches that implemented changes to promote PA, members at two churches perceived increases in healthy PA messages ($p<0.05$) and those at three churches perceived increased PA facilities ($p<0.05$). One of two churches that implemented TUP policies, according to responses of members, had an increase in messages on smoking, ($p<0.05$).

Conclusions: Community mini-grants may be a viable mechanism for promoting environmental change supporting HE, PA, and TUP policies in church environments.