

Arkansas Department of Health Community Health Nurse Specialists: A Decade of Promoting and Improving Health in Arkansas Schools and Communities

BACKGROUND

In 2002 the Arkansas Department of Health, per Initiated Act One, used Mater Tobacco Settlement funds to hire 16 Registered Public Health Nurses as Community Health Nurse Specialists. The purpose was to develop a highly skilled and experienced team of public health nurses who could impact community and school health. CHNS work in the ADH Hometown Health Branch and operate out of the Arkansas Department of Education Educational Cooperatives in each region of the state, enabling them to forge partnerships that link and improve health and learning.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSE SPECIALIST

Community Health Nurse Specialists work under the supervision of the Regional Community Health Nurse Supervisor and provide technical assistance, training, and policy guidance for schools, school nurses and community coalitions. Each CHNS serves as the school/community liaison and health resource expert at the local level. The State School Nurse Consultant works with school nurses, school administrators, and Community Health Nurse Specialists to improve the health of school children in Arkansas.

COMMUNITY HEALTH NURSE SPECIALIST ACTIVITIES

- Identify and evaluate training needs of school nurses and targeted communities with respect to tobacco prevention and cessation and other related public health issues
- Participate in policy development and school-based enforcement of tobacco related policies
- Link school-based tobacco prevention efforts with local community coalitions
- Act as liaison between schools, community coalitions, Hometown Health Improvement, and health care providers
- Assess needs of schools and communities
- Plan/implement activities and programs based on needs and founded on best public health practices
- Provide mentorship, orientation, training and updates for school nurses
- Assist the State School Nurse Consultant in development and provision of continuing education hours for nurses
- Provide school nurses with mandated health screening certification training on BMI, scoliosis, vision and hearing
- Organize technical assistance and professional development for PE teachers, health teachers, counselors and other school personnel.
- Present health and disease updates to school staff, students and families
- Serve on school wellness committees that address policy on school health screenings and health issues
- Participate in school health policy development and disseminate model policies, such as tobacco and nutrition policies

- Collaborate with special education coordinators on needed training for teachers and assistants
- Work with school nurses to develop individual health care plans for children with chronic conditions such as diabetes, ADHD and asthma
- Facilitate workshops for teachers/counselors/others on mental health, suicide prevention, traumatic brain injury, teen pregnancy/STI prevention, and tobacco prevention
- Participate in community health events, such as interactive education at health fairs
- Present health information to civic groups and organizations
- Partner with Arkansas Children Hospital to provide evidence-based health education, including injury prevention
- Coordinate and work in school and mass flu clinics
- Participate in data collection of statewide surveys such as Youth Tobacco Survey, Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Survey

PUBLIC HEALTH SUCCESSES

Youth smoking has decreased from 35.8 percent in 2000 to 20.4 percent in 2007 (approximately 21,500 fewer high school students who smoke) followed by a slight increase to 23.5 percent in 2010. The 2010 rate was still 34 percent lower than the 2000 rate.

The percentage of Arkansas youth attempting to purchase tobacco decreased from 21.9 percent in 2001 to 4.8 percent in 2008. While national statistics remain stagnant, Arkansas continues to show a decline in youth smoking.

At least eight school districts have implemented Comprehensive School Tobacco Control Policies that meet CDC guidelines.

Countless numbers of students participated in tobacco education activities.

Numerous communities were educated about smoke-free vehicles (Act 811) through PTA meetings, newsletters, school websites and health fairs.

School staff and administrators were educated about the Arkansas Quitline during in-service training.

In 2009, Arkansas was the only state to vaccinate children in all public school districts and charter schools for seasonal flu and H1N1 flu. A total of 447,853 seasonal doses and 343,292 H1N1 doses for a total of 791,145 flu doses were reported to the ADH immunization registry by both public and private providers. Of those, 345,008 (153,927 H1N1 and 191,161 seasonal) were given to students at 1,093 school/daycare clinics, including 77 private schools.

School staff has been trained in CPR/AED and also trained in administration of epinephrine for life-threatening allergic reactions.

Teachers and coaches have been trained in Asthma 101 so they can recognize asthma symptoms and act promptly to avoid life-threatening asthma episodes.

For more information please visit: www.healthy.arkansas.gov and www.arkansascsh.org