



Community Connections

A COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER FROM THE
UCLA/RAND CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT HEALTH PROMOTION

FEBRUARY 2006

NEW COMMUNITY-ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP TO ADDRESS DISPARITIES IN OBESITY AMONG L.A. UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT YOUTH

The UCLA/RAND Center for Adolescent Health Promotion was recently awarded a three-year grant from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to develop and pilot test an intervention that addresses racial/ethnic disparities in obesity among middle school students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). This new community-based research (CBPR) project is a collaborative effort of researchers from UCLA and RAND, health leaders from LAUSD, L.A. County Department of Health Services, L.A. City Department of Parks and Recreation, local community-based organizations, and other city and county departments and agencies that serve Los Angeles youth and their families.

The project goals are to build a strong partnership between researchers and community members in order to (1) assess community needs and priorities for obesity programs in LAUSD middle schools; and (2) design and pilot test an intervention to address obesity among LAUSD middle school students by, for example, increasing exercise and/or healthy eating.

To accomplish these goals, we have brought together key stakeholders in the L.A. community with active interests, research, and expertise in adolescent obesity, physical activity, and nutrition to be a part of the project's Healthy Living Advisory Board (HLAB). The HLAB, which meets every two months, is participating in every phase of this project. In addition to working with this new advisory board, we are building upon existing collaborations with our Center's Carson-Wilmington Community Advisory Board (CAB), our L.A.-wide Youth Advisory Board, and other community and school stakeholders in L.A. County to obtain broad community input.

We plan to spend the first year of the project discussing the project with community members and using their input to help design an intervention. We will conduct extensive community-based work, including interviews with community leaders, parent and teen focus groups, and community town hall meetings to assess local needs and priorities for addressing adolescent obesity.

Based on community members' input, we will collaboratively design and pilot test an intervention in the Carson and Wilmington communities of L.A. We will evaluate the feasibility of the intervention for large-scale implementation in L.A. County, and assess how the intervention affects physical activity and eating behaviors. We plan to apply for another grant to examine the intervention's effectiveness at promoting healthy behaviors among LAUSD youth across L.A. County.

For more information about this study, please contact Jennifer Hawes-Dawson, Community Liaison, UCLA/RAND Center for Adolescent Health Promotion, at (310) 393-0411, ext. 7238 or via email at hawes@rand.org.

PROJECT LEADERSHIP TEAM

LAURA M. BOGART, PHD
CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, RAND

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JENNIFER HAWES-DAWSON, BA
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MARK A. SCHUSTER, MD, PHD
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, UCLA/RAND

KIMBERLY UYEDA, MD, MPH
CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR, LAUSD

FEATURED COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

JOSEFINA (JOSIE) OLARITA-DHUNGANA OF THE CARSON FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER



Josefina (Josie) Olarita-Dhungana has been a very active and dedicated member of the Center's Carson-Wilmington Community Advisory Board (CAB) for the past four years. She is the Director of the Carson Family Resource Center Healthy Start, a school-based, family support program of the L.A. Unified School District. Her organization's mission is to support the instructional program of the LAUSD schools in Carson by reducing barriers to learning of individual students as well as providing empowerment to their families. During her seven years with LAUSD, she has coordinated several other programs, including First 5 L.A. Community Initiatives Program, a City of Carson CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) for Family and Couples Counseling, and a three-year, state-funded School Community Policing Partnership Program (SCPP) covering 8 schools in Carson (Carson High School, Carnegie Middle School, and 6 feeder elementary schools). The SCPP focused on reducing truancy and chronic absenteeism by providing case management, family support, and mental health counseling to students and their families.

In addition, Ms. Olarita-Dhungana serves as the Center's alternate Western Regional Community Representative to the National Community Committee (NCC), a representative body of community partners of the 33 Prevention Research Centers funded by the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She and fellow CAB member Mena Hughes have played a key role in building a strong collaborative relationship between our Center and the NCC. Ms. Olarita-Dhungana was also selected by the CDC to serve as a Community Representative on the CDC's 13-member Collaborative Evaluation Design Team (CEDT) for the national evaluation of the PRCs across the country. Most recently, she has come on board as a valuable member of our Healthy Living Advisory Board (HLAB) as well as a community outreach specialist for the new youth obesity study.

Ms. Olarita-Dhungana brings a unique set of skills and talents from diverse areas—academic training in research methods combined with NPO experience with program design, service delivery, program evaluation, and community outreach. She has a Masters degree in Communication and has completed her second Masters degree, MS Counseling (Marriage and Family Therapy). She is currently completing the required clinical hours for her California licensing requirements. She also has valuable research background in designing and implementing needs assessments and program evaluation studies in health and human services. She has managed and worked on several projects with organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the United Way of Greater Los Angeles. She is currently one of the 17 board members of the California Family Resource Association, a statewide membership of organizations and individuals advocating for policies, programs, and resources that help families and communities to thrive and succeed.

Ms. Olarita-Dhungana is also an active volunteer in her community. She is on the Advisory Board of the BLIMP's Lighter-than-Air Historical Society of Carson, a founding board member of the Friends of Nepal-LA, and a sweet adelines bass singer with the Golden Sands Chorus of Long Beach. Ms. Olarita-Dhungana and her spouse Shambhu are also proud parents of twins Jeffrey Carlo (UCLA) and Karla (Loyola Marymount University), and eldest son Rajan (UCLA).

WHAT'S NEW AT THE CENTER?

NEW PROJECTS

Adaptations of "Talking Parents, Healthy Teens Program." With funding from the National Institutes of Health, CDC, and the University-wide AIDS Research Program, we are adapting our "Talking Parents, Healthy Teens" curriculum to cover additional topics, to include adolescents along with their parents, and to be taught in alternate venues such as schools or worksites.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CONTINUING PROJECTS

Healthy Passages. We are currently in the second year of data collection for this community-based, longitudinal study of child and adolescent health. Last year, in the 2004-2005 school year, we successfully interviewed over 875 fifth-graders and their primary caregivers in L.A. County. We are now in the process of enrolling and interviewing 875 new families from 15 elementary schools that were randomly selected to join our study. We plan to interview the study participants every two years for up to ten years (and possibly beyond).

The Role of Parks in Physical Activity and Health. Deborah Cohen, MD, MPH, Principal Investigator, presented preliminary results from this study at the February 14th Carson-Wilmington Community Advisory Board meeting and the Healthy Living Advisory Board on February 21, 2006. A summary of the key findings can be found on the RAND Corporation website at http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR357/

Parent-Teen Communication Workshop. Center researcher Kathy Vestal, MPH, was the guest speaker at a parent workshop sponsored by LAUSD District 8 on December 13, 2005, where she discussed the importance of parent-child communication and the parent-child relationship, and ways that parents can promote healthy development and discourage risky behaviors among their children.

RECENT CENTER PUBLICATIONS

Cohen DA, Finch BK, Bower A, Sastry N. "Collective Efficacy and Obesity: The Potential Influence of Social Factors on Health." *Social Science & Medicine*, 2006; 62:769-778.

Chung PJ, Lee TC, Morrison JL, Schuster MA. "Preventive Care for Children in the United States: Quality and Disparities." *Annual Review of Public Health*, 2006; 27:10.1-10.25.

Schuster MA, Collins RL, Cunningham WE, Morton SC, Zierler S, Wong M, Tu W, Kanouse DE. "Perceived Discrimination in Clinical Care in a Nationally Representative Sample of HIV-Infected Adults Receiving Health Care." *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 2005; 20:807-813.

PROPOSED APHA PANEL ON YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PRCs

Our Center was recently invited by the CDC to submit a proposal to participate in a special panel session at the November 2006 American Public Health Association's Meeting entitled, "The importance of including youth in the effort to conduct relevant research to improve the health of young people: Lessons learned."

YOUTH CORNER



The Center's **Youth Advisory Leadership Council** is made up of 16 high school students from various schools across the L.A. area. In the Council, they have the opportunity to improve their leadership skills, as well as learn about health issues relevant to teens. They are given the opportunity to voice their opinions about new projects that the Center is working on.

Recently, they had the opportunity to participate in two focus groups where they were asked to give their opinions on parent-teen communication issues. They also gave opinions on physical activity and nutrition.

FOCUS GROUP TRAINING WORKSHOP

FACILITATOR, **BEVERLY WEIDMER-OCAMPO**

On January 20, 2006, the Center conducted a one-day Focus Group Training Workshop for staff from UCLA, RAND, and community representatives who will serve as moderators and assistant moderators/note-takers for parent and teen focus groups that will be conducted in Spring 2006 as part of the formative research phase of several Center projects.

SAN DIEGO PRC LATINO HEALTH NETWORK

The two-fold mission of the San Diego Prevention Research Center's (CDC) Latino Health Network (LHN) is to address risk factors that may contribute to health disparities between many Latino and other communities; and to identify and disseminate culturally appropriate measures and interventions aimed at increasing physical activity in Latino populations. They are in the process of finalizing the LHN website which will include information about PRC projects (including those conducted by our Center) that include Latino participants and to identify physical activity measures being used in PRC studies. Jennifer Hawes-Dawson, Community Liaison, will be the designated Center contact to this network. If you have any questions, feel free to give her a call at (310) 393-0411, ext. 7238 or via email at hawes@rand.org.

ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATION...

The UCLA/RAND Center for Adolescent Health Promotion is a Prevention Research Centers currently funded by the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Center is a unique partnership of three research and educational institutions – the UCLA Department of Pediatrics, the UCLA School of Public Health, and RAND (a non-partisan, private, non-profit research institute that conducts research to improve public policy) and local community and school groups.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our Center's mission, jointly determined with our community partners, is to conduct community-based participatory research, develop programs, disseminate findings, and provide education and training related to adolescent health promotion, risk reduction, and disease prevention, with an emphasis on projects that involve parents of adolescents. We focus on activities that respond to community needs, can be incorporated into community practice, and builds community capacities.



QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Contact Jennifer Hawes-Dawson,
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Congratulations!

Burt Cowgill, MPH, for passing his public health comp exams. He can now move forward on his dissertation.

Typhanye Penniman, our Center's nominee for the ASPH/CDC/PRC Minority Doctoral Student Fellowship Program.

Mark A. Schuster, MD, PhD, for being appointed by the Mayor of Los Angeles to be a Commissioner on the L.A. City Commission for Children, Youth, and Their Families and selected as Chair of the Health and Nutrition Committee.