

**Engaging Extension to Build Community Capacity to Improve Healthy Eating and Active Living Resources and Readiness to Address the Rural Obesogenic Context and Weight Health Disparities**

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PRESENTATION FORMAT: 15 minute oral presentation

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Environmental Health; Community Health Organizations, Public Health, Health Education, and Obesity Prevention Practitioners

ABSTRACT: Background/Purpose: Rural residency is a risk factor for obesity; yet, environmental strategies to promote weight healthy lifestyles are more applicable to non-rural settings. HEAL MAPPS was developed as a participatory action research tool to be employed by extension staff and community health partners as an engagement, assessment, and intervention approach to address the rural obesogenic environment.

Methods/Approach: Extension partners from six land-grant universities were trained to employ HEAL MAPPS using a train-the-trainer model. HEAL MAPPS was implemented in 21 rural communities with two objectives: (1) residents engaged in photomapping local resources that they encountered as supporting or hindering weight healthy lifestyles; (2) local decision-makers and residents revealed readiness to implement community-level prevention strategies to reduce rural obesity risk.

Results/Outcomes: Thematic supports emerged as HEAL resources that were locally available, widely accessible and affordable; barriers emerged as spatial inaccessibility/distance, quality/maintenance, and cost of HEAL resources. On average, communities were at the preplanning ( $M=3.68$ ,  $SD=0.47$ ) level of overall readiness and ranged from lowest level 2 (denial/resistance) in Leadership to highest level 6 (initiation) in both Current Efforts and Available Resources dimensions.

Conclusions: HEAL MAPPS was effective in mobilizing local people to assess attributes of their rural community place that make HEAL patterns easy or hard to maintain for residents, and revealing the community's readiness to change the obesogenic context and address weight health disparities.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe HEAL MAPPS as a Extension tool to be employed by community health partners as an engagement, assessment, and intervention approach to address issues of weight health and place. Explain why HEAL patterns are easy or hard to maintain for rural residents, and the role of community resources and readiness in changing the obesogenic context to address weight health disparities.

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