

Culturally Relevant Health Promotion: Implementing and Evaluating a Traditional Activities and Games Program to Increase Physical Activity and Cultural Knowledge in a Native American Community

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Abstract

Background: Chronic conditions like hypertension and diabetes that were once isolated to adults have become a more common health issue among American Indian/Alaska Native youth (AI/AN) (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015), with AIAN children having the highest rates of obesity of all ethnic groups. Many factors contribute to obesity among AI/AN children: decreased physical activity; increased use of electronics; shift to processed foods from a high-quality, indigenous diet; and the consumption of high-fructose corn syrup (Styne, 2010). The Office of the Surgeon General (2010) recommends that children be physically active for a minimum of 60 minutes a day for healthy development of muscles and bones.

Problem: The Nez Perce Tribe identified lack of physical activity and transmission of cultural knowledge, traditions and customs as a community concern.

Aim: The specific aim of this community health improvement project was to develop, implement and evaluate a culturally relevant physical activity intervention to

increase youth physical activity and participation in Niimíipuu (Nez Perce) traditional customs.

Outcome measures: The primary outcome measures evaluated were adult attendance to community trainings and adult and youth engagement in physical and cultural activities, using a pre-intervention survey tool. Results: In December 2014, the Niimíipuu Traditional Activities and Games booklet was completed and used to develop a traditional activities and games community training program. Evaluation is ongoing and results will provide further evidence for those AI/AN communities interested in developing their own culturally relevant physical activity projects.

Key words: culture, American Indian, Alaska Native, physical activity