



The Community Health Workforce: Taking Health to the People

Helen M. DuPlessis, MD, MPH

Name of project or collaborative

St. John's Wellchild and Family Center (SJWCFC)

Geography

Central and South Los Angeles, California

Brief description

Over the past 8 years, St. John's Wellchild and Family Center (SJWCFC), an FQHC network, has been part of a growing Healthy Homes South Los Angeles (HHSLA) collaborative. The HHSLA collaborative is comprised of health service providers, community health promoters, tenant organizers, and affordable housing and civil rights advocates who ameliorate the health consequences of substandard and slum housing in Central and South Los Angeles, while shifting the discourse around housing and health.

In 1996, SJWCFC and Esperanza Community Housing Corporation (Esperanza) began work on lead poison prevention. Services included health services and treatment for children with elevated blood lead, anchored by home visits conducted by promotoras who assess substandard conditions in pre-70s housing stock, and who educate/empower parents to minimize adverse exposures.

Between 1996 and 2003, Strategic Actions for a Just Society (SAJE) joined the coalition, and project focus expanded to include harvesting of data that influenced local and state policy. From 2004-2006, data collection identified indisputable connections between health disorders, such as childhood asthma, lead poisoning, and slum housing in the Figueroa Corridor, from Downtown through South Los Angeles.

By 2009 the Healthy Homes Healthy Kids (HHHK) project embraced a comprehensive approach: home visits, health program enrollment, medical homes for participating families, advocacy, and policy development.

Across all projects a community health promoter model is utilized to ensure the greatest level of receptivity, cultural competency, and program success.

Results/outcomes

- 80% reduction in % of clients with asthma ER visits
- 67% reduction in % of clients with asthma hospitalization
- 55% - 96% reduction in the number of school days missed because of asthma
- 69% reduction in % of children missing one or more days of school due to asthma.
- 69% reduction in clinic/doctor visits due to acute asthma attacks
- 100% decrease in missed work days by parents
- 100% decrease in asthma hospitalizations
- 50% reduction in the number of emergency room visits
- 47% reduction in skin conditions associated with vermin bites, cockroaches and environment

The Collaborative:
Esperanza Community Housing Corporation
Los Angeles City Attorney's Office
Neighborhood Legal Services
Strategic Actions for a Just Society (SAJE)
St John's Wellchild and Family Center

Other Accomplishments:

- Dialogue with city and county officials on improved coordination between city housing and county health investigation and enforcement
- Los Angeles City Council motion to improve communication and tracking of City and County lead monitoring and remediation efforts (2008)
- Presentation at regional and national conferences and adoption of report recommendations by Los Angeles health and homelessness collaborative
- Founding of the First Annual South Los Angeles Health and Human Rights Conference in 2009 that provided nearly 800 advocates, service providers, and policymakers with a common language to address determinants of health and work across silos
- *South Los Angeles Declaration of Health and Human Rights*.¹ This community engagement and policy advocacy process has inspired and informed community efforts in Northern California, Vermont, and Alabama and elsewhere and has shifted policy discourse within South Los Angeles
- Secured policy changes within the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles to protect tenants' health during rehabilitation processes and increase oversight of landlords
- Los Angeles City Attorney's office dedicated resources to large, criminal slumlord activity utilizing innovative criminal charges (e.g., child endangerment statutes and case law) to prosecute intransigent slumlords
- Medical Legal Partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS)
- SJWCFC providers and patients provided testimonials to clinical groups, and elected officials, helping to demonstrate the importance of integrated and comprehensive asthma prevention and treatment

Publications:

The Shame of the City

Taming the Perfect Storm

Publication of our work in Harvard's Health and Human Rights Journal leading to international awareness of our approach to healthy housing in South Los Angeles;²

Shame of the City – The Sequel

Funding

British Petroleum Settlement/Air Quality Management District Funds, First 5 Los Angeles, EveryChild Foundation, Housing and Urban Development Agency, and Kresge Foundation

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¹ The Declaration has been signed by over 1500 people so far. <http://www.southlahealthandhumanrights.org/declaration.html>

² Shame of the City report can be accessed online: <http://www.lbaca.org/PolicyFormation/docs/Slum%20Housing%20Report.pdf>

² Harvard Health and Human Rights Journal link to Taming the Perfect Storm report can be accessed online: <http://hhrjournal.org/blog/articles/taming-the-perfect-storm/>