

Reducing Tobacco Use in Pregnancy in Yukon Kuskokwim (YK) Delta Women

Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation, Bethel, Alaska

Project Overview

From August 2009 through July 2012, using a culturally relevant education intervention, the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) focused on increasing awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco on personal and fetal health in order to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use among pregnant Alaska Native women in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹, risks associated with tobacco use include an increased risk of miscarriage, poor placental development, premature birth, sudden infant death syndrome, birth defects, and low birth weight that increases the likelihood of illness. In 2007, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (ADHSS) reported that 46 percent of Alaska Natives in Southwestern Alaska were tobacco users compared to 42 percent statewide. ADHSS also reported at that time that 20 percent of pregnant Alaska Native women in the region smoked cigarettes compared to 28 percent statewide, but that relationship inverts when looking at smokeless tobacco usage with 47 percent of pregnant Alaska Native women in the region using compared to just 18 percent statewide.²

The overarching goal of the YKHC project was to reduce the prevalence of any tobacco use in the last three months of pregnancy among Alaska Native women to less than 30 percent in three years.

¹ "Reproductive Health; Tobacco Use and Pregnancy," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, last updated October 24, 2012, accessed November 15, 2012, <http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/tobaccousepregnancy/index.htm>.

² "Southwest Region Fact Sheet" (Juneau, AK: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, tobacco Prevention and Control Program, March 2007), http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Documents/Tobacco/PDF/Southwest_fact_sheet.pdf.

Achieving this goal was organized around three objectives:

- Increase the knowledge of pregnant Alaska Native women in their third trimester about harmful effects of tobacco on personal and fetal health to at least 85 percent in three years.
- Increase the number of pregnant Alaska Native women tobacco users who receive cessation counseling to at least 30 percent in three years.
- Increase the number of pregnant women who have seen or heard local media efforts warning of the risks of tobacco use during pregnancy to at least 80 percent in three years.

Program/Activities

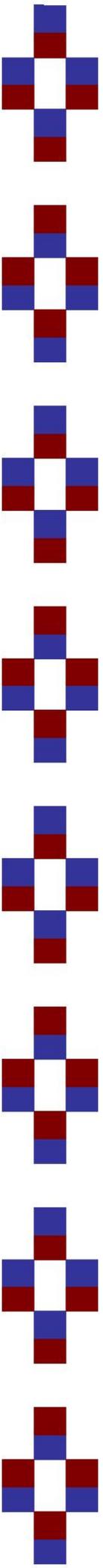
Program activities included communications through the development and distribution of culturally appropriate direct mail to all pregnant women living in the region, anti-tobacco literature from other organizations placed in clinics and hospital, anti-tobacco posters placed in 58 area high schools using slogans developed for teens by teens, and posters displayed in local newspapers promoting tobacco abstinence among local women and teens. Two new radio ads were created each month using local personalities and produced in Yup'ik and English airing twice daily on the local radio station. Women were also presented information on the risks of tobacco use during group classes.

Resources were shared with health care providers to facilitate screening for tobacco use and for making referrals to tobacco cessation counseling. Referrals to counseling and nicotine replacement therapy offered through the hospital were also made by the program counselor.

Data were collected using anonymous surveys of pregnant women staying in the pre-maternal home and by surveying a sample of pregnant Alaska Native women who did not stay at the pre-maternal home.

Program/Activity Outcome

The program almost reached its goal of reducing tobacco use among pregnant Alaska Native women to less than 30 percent. By the end of the third year, the program saw that rate reduced from 47 percent to 32 percent. In addition, the program achieved the following outcomes:



- Through the surveys conducted, YKHC found that more than 90 percent of women in the Delta were aware of the harmful effects of tobacco use.
- The program increased the percentage of pregnant women who receive cessation counseling from 10 percent in the first year to 21 percent by the end of the third year.
- The surveys conducted also allowed program staff to measure the extent of their marketing efforts by asking pregnant women about their exposure to fliers, posters, and radio ads.

The results of the program also indicate that partnerships with other organizations in the community improved the conditions for success, and leveraging existing programs proved an effective approach to increasing the scope of the outreach and communication activities.

Next Steps

To continue the program at its present scale, additional funding is being sought from the National Cancer Institute. In the interim, certain services will continue to be offered such as community outreach and education and the high school program; and the hospital will still offer cessation counseling. Information from the program has also been shared with the YKHC regional hospital to assist with future program planning and implementation.

