Lessons Learned from Mapping the ‘Obesity System’ of Kansas City

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Our goals for mapping the childhood obesity system:

1. Create a research-based integrative regional database all of the programs related to childhood obesity

2. Support planning and coordination to ensure that this system effectively meets the long-term needs of children and their families

Why think about health as a system?

‘The essential elements of a multilevel agenda are framing obesity as a complex systems problem; encouraging cross-disciplinary questions and hypotheses; focusing on structural interventions (i.e., modifications to the environment or policies); building capacity for multilevel research and action.’

Socio-ecological system & dimensions

- Formal structures
- Social and physical environment
- Transmission of behaviors and practices
Obesity Systems Mapping- The process

Occurred in 2012-13

**Step 1**: Advisory council: 20 leaders in the field of childhood obesity in KC
  - Describe the obesity system

**Step 2**: Orgs identified through WI partners, regional alliances, online searches, and the Midwest Center’s internal database

**Step 3**: Research team- Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership: created the database and collected data

**Step 4**: Orgs received online survey
  - Email invite, telephone follow-up
What we discovered: 260 programs are part of the childhood obesity system in KC

Target Populations

- Infants: 9%
- Early Childhood: 16%
- School-aged Children: 26%
- Professionals: 19%
- Parents and Families: 18%
- Pregnant Women: 12%

# of Programs by Location

- Hospital
- Home
- Online
- Healthcare Facility
- Other
- Neighborhood
- Unknown
- Community Center
- Organization’s Facility
- School
What we discovered: The number of programs vary by their core function
What we discovered: Amount and proportion of programs vary by their socio-ecological dimension

Formal structures
143 programs

Social and physical environment
333 programs

Transmission of behaviors and practices
248 programs

Dimensions Of Socio-ecological Model
How we use it- guide our coalition

• KC programs operate at every level of the system, address every element of the ecosystem, and serve every functional a system typically requires. As such, the region is very fortunate.

• However…opportunity exists to further link and integrate their work

• Extensive network of advocacy programs → need to ensure they coordinate to maximize impact

• Abundance of education programs; most are nutrition information programs → Opportunities for physical activity programs
Lessons learned

- Need to ‘weight’ different parts of the system
- We did not measure ‘connectedness’ of the system
- Lack of understanding of systems approaches by stakeholders/funders
- Challenge to utilize the actual database
Acknowledgements

**Children’s Mercy**
- Francis Bozsik
- Shelly Summar
- Jordan Carlson
- Emily Dewit
- Emily Meissen-Sebelius
- Deborah Markenson

**Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at UMKC**
- David Renz, PhD
- Cindy Laufer