A CASE STUDY OF PREVENTION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SHARED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Building Public Support for Quality Early Childcare Early in Life

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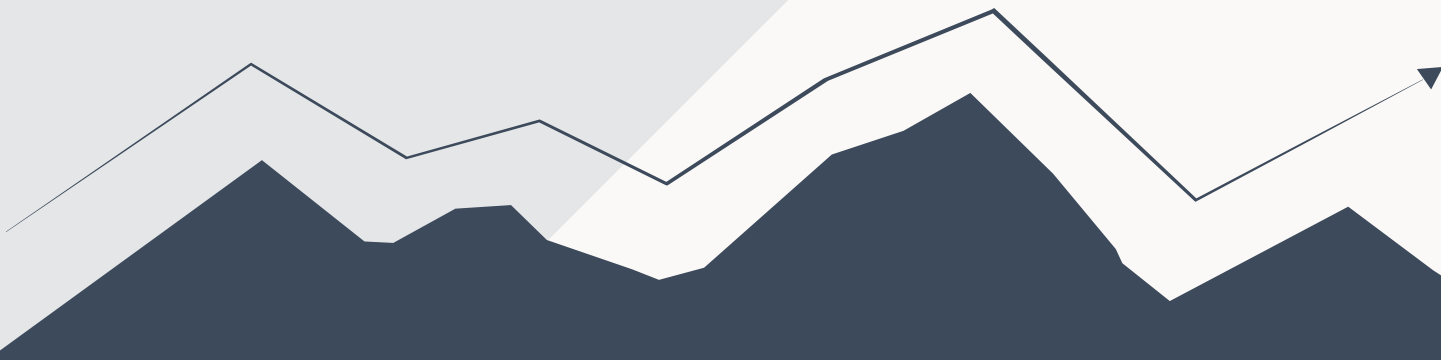Health & Environmen

CDPHE

Introduction

In recent years, Colorado community coalitions leveraging the Communities That Care (CTC) model implemented evidence-based upstream prevention strategies to address shared risk and protective factors that impact health and behavior outcomes. In partnership with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), researchers on the Technical Assistance and Evaluation team at the University of Colorado Anschutz's Colorado School of Public Health (the CU team) directly supported communities implementing CTC and prevention strategies. As part of this support, the CU team collected data from communities who implemented a prevention strategy to Build Public Support for Quality Early Childcare Early in Life (QECC).

The goal of this data collection effort was to highlight best practices and challenges faced by communities implementing this prevention strategy. This case study report was produced to help any community organizing for prevention to gain a deeper understanding of how the prevention strategy works in practice. This report provides valuable information based on community lived experience by noting strategy successes and challenges.

Communities organizing for prevention can use the best practices featured in this report in the planning and implementation of prevention strategies locally. In addition, awareness of common issues and pitfalls can help set up other communities for success and streamline progress.

In January 2021, the CU team began collecting data from pre-recorded affinity group (prevention strategy) meetings and focus group interviews. Data analysis began in April 2021, and final reports were written in August 2021. Of note is that prevention strategy implementation largely occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is important context surrounding the challenges experienced by communities. Analysis of focus group interviews and prevention strategy meetings revealed best practices that encouraged the success of the strategy.

Following is a summary of the results, and major themes are discussed in more detail in this report.

Coalition diversity and commitment; intentional goal setting; consistent communication and community involvement; motivation to seek funding and education; and the ability to evaluate and evolve are keys to a QECC strategy's success. However, unique barriers due to COVID-19; limitations within the strategy's reach, funding, or staffing; inter-agency competition and staff turnover; and a lack of backbone support can challenge a strategy's progress.

Methods

This project aimed to collect data from prevention strategy meetings and focus group interviews about evidence-based upstream prevention strategy implementation to focus on the experiences of Colorado community coalitions and highlight best practices and challenges. The results featured in this case study report can assist communities organizing for prevention in current or future implementation efforts.

Focus group interviews were conducted with community members involved in the QECC prevention strategy that had been implemented locally for more than six months.

Audio recordings of interviews and prevention strategy meetings were transcribed with transcription software and reviewed for accuracy.

Transcripts were examined for meaningful statements and phrases, which were noted using a defined code. All statements that embodied each code were analyzed for overarching ideas and themes.

Major themes were separated into two distinct categories highlighting the prevention strategy's

1. Best Practices
2. Challenges experienced during implementation

In addition, communities offered recommendations for success for other communities planning to implement this strategy in the future.

Acknowledgements

Strategy Results: Quality Early Childcare

Recommendations For QECC Communities

- QECC is not a short-term process, so be resilient and committed to the important work you are doing. The end result is worth time invested.

- Evaluate your work regularly and do not be discouraged if the strategy did not progress as much as expected.

- Celebrate all wins, even small ones!

- Work with each other and keep strategy goals in mind at every step, especially during challenges.

- Facilitators are there to guide you along the way through challenges.

- Never over-promise and under-deliver; follow through all your work.

Best Practices

Diverse coalitions who are committed to working together lead to well-rounded QECC strategies

A coalition's structure and commitment to the QECC strategy are major driving forces for success. Diverse coalitions that represent many community members, including daycare centers/providers, parents, youth, politicians, and community organizations, create community-specific approaches. Supporting paid positions within the coalition helped communities as well, and a strong commitment to the work helped move the strategy forward.

Intentional goal setting promotes progress

Setting short- and medium-term goals for QECC allows the coalition to see results of their work and remain motivated to continue the more difficult, long-term activities that reach long-term goals. Setting clear goals and creating a shared vision leads to increased momentum, even in the face of challenges.

Willingness to connect and consistent, open communication leads to strong relationships that push the strategy forward

By consistently communicating and not deviating from meeting schedules, a coalition builds strong relationships with each other and other organizations. Consistent communication also maintains strategy implementation momentum.

Proactive coalitions who evaluate, evolve, and adapt create successful strategies

Constant evaluation of the strategy's progress and a community's needs is highly beneficial and allows the strategy and coalition to adapt to changing needs, environments, and priorities. In addition, a proactive coalition is more likely to have the skills necessary to confront and overcome challenges.

Funding can come from a diverse set of avenues, so be creative in seeking and utilizing funds

Funding for QECC can be difficult to come by, so it is beneficial to think of non-traditional funding avenues to pursue, such as asking stakeholders to fund the efforts. Seek out grants to fund the work and use the expertise of the leadership team in identifying funding opportunities. In addition, use funds in a variety of ways, from hiring personnel to share the workload to paying for coalition skills training. Funding ultimately helps the coalition sustain its efforts.

Communication with the community to identify and address their needs is crucial

All communities have different QECC needs, so working with the community is key when designing a strategy. Establishing relationships with community members requires hard work and consistent communication throughout the process to ensure their needs are being addressed. In doing so, it is more likely that a strategy will make meaningful change in the community.

Building knowledge and skills of community members in QECC is key

Not everyone knows the importance of QECC, so early outreach and education in the community will help gain widespread support for this strategy. In addition, the coalition should be actively learning about QECC and gaining skills in grant writing or policy change to develop a successful, sustainable strategy.

Challenges

COVID-19 impacts

Coalitions could not predict the COVID-19 pandemic, and it impacted strategies in many ways. Community and partner participation proved difficult when priorities and funding shifted from upstream prevention efforts to the COVID-19 response. In addition, coalitions found it difficult to continue operations as a result of the pandemic, including conducting regular meetings, despite their desire to move forward.

Reach can be limited by many factors, including difficulty connecting or engaging with stakeholders and a lack of personnel or funding

Reaching community members who are not affected by or involved with QECC can be difficult. It can also be tough to work within time and job description restraints. For example, a facilitator found it difficult to conduct all their duties while also completing sufficient community outreach in their time allotted to their job. In addition, a lack of funding can restrict implementation of large-scale activities.

Working with many agencies can create conflict; competition, building trust, and turnover can lengthen strategy timelines

Coalitions described "turf wars" or instances where agencies found themselves competing with one another rather than working together to reach a shared goal or obtain funding. Inconsistent communication and staff turnover among outside agencies makes building relationships and a shared understanding of the strategy's goals difficult and leads to spending extra time explaining the strategy to new staff during meetings rather than discussing how to move forward.

Backbone support in the form of guidance, time, funding, and personnel is crucial, and without it, progress stalls

Backbone agencies can stall a strategy's progress by not understanding the importance of QECC, by failing to provide funding for the efforts, and by not helping coalitions identify and apply for funding opportunities. Coalitions expressed the need for backbone agencies to provide expert guidance to the coalition throughout the planning and implementation processes while also supporting their efforts viaproviding personnel dedicated to the strategy.