Community Transformation Grants

By Amy Winterfeld

Chronic diseases account for 75 percent of the $2.5 trillion spent annually for health care in the United States. Because many chronic conditions are preventable, states are turning to federal Community Transformation Grants (CTG) to help keep people healthier. These grants fund community programs to prevent diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. They also aim to narrow gaps in health across population groups. Rural communities, which have higher rates of chronic disease, receive 20 percent of CTG funds.

Administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the CTG grants are expected to affect one in three—120 million—Americans during a five-year grant cycle. State and local grantees can choose their own approaches to reducing chronic disease risks by working in one or a combination of the program’s priority areas:

- Tobacco-free living;
- Active living and healthy eating; and
- Controlling high blood pressure and cholesterol with clinical and preventive services.

Grantees also may focus on improving social and emotional wellness by identifying mental health needs early, improving access to quality mental health services, and promoting healthy and safe physical environments.

**Federal Action**

Community Transformation Grants were created as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. In 2011, the act’s Prevention and Public Health Fund awarded more than $103 million to 61 state and local government agencies, tribes, territories and nonprofit organizations in 36 states. Nearly $4 million more in CTG funds was awarded to six national networks of community-based organizations. The CTG program expanded in 2012, providing an additional $70 million to 40 communities with fewer than 500,000 people, reaching another 9.2 million Americans.

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**Did You Know?**

- Heart disease, cancer and stroke account for more than 50 percent of all U.S. deaths.
- By 2020, the number of Americans with a chronic illness is expected to reach 157 million.
- Community Transformation Grants fund programs to help prevent chronic diseases.

**Source:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov/communitytransformation/funds/map.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/communitytransformation/funds/map.htm)
**State Action**

In half the states, recipients currently are implementing CTG grants, and 15 states are building public health capacity to deliver preventive services and programs. Six national networks facilitated by organizations such as the American Lung Association and the YMCA of the USA are conducting prevention outreach in diverse communities. Grants in 24 states and the District of Columbia include tribes, territories and smaller communities. The programs are addressing the three major CTG priority areas and working to achieve health equity by reducing differences in health status related to gender, race or ethnicity, education, income, disability and geography.

**Tobacco-Free Living.** Diseases caused by tobacco use remain the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Each year, tobacco-related illnesses cost taxpayers more than $96 billion in medical expenses and $97 billion in lost productivity. The CDC reports that 91 percent of CTG awardees are working to limit tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure. Many states have enacted and implemented smoke-free policies for all workplaces, restaurants and bars. All states have programs to reduce youth access to tobacco, and many continue to propose increasing the age for purchasing tobacco.

**Healthy Eating.** State efforts to make nutritious food available in communities include fiscal incentives in at least six states and the District of Columbia to improve retail access to fresh produce, low-fat dairy and whole grain foods. State procurement policies or nutrition standards encourage or require schools, prisons and licensed child care facilities to meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. State policies also support breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed infants and reducing sodium in foods to help prevent high blood pressure, which affects one in three Americans. Seventy percent of CTG grant recipients also address nutrition policies, standards or guidelines.

**Active Living.** State efforts also focus on physical activity, physical education requirements in schools, school wellness policies, and physical activity during recess or outdoor education. State complete streets policies encourage community designs that promote physical activity (e.g., sidewalks, bicycle lanes), which also support people’s ability to meet national physical activity guidelines. Seventy-five percent of CTG awardees are working to expand opportunities for physical activity for all community members. New Mexico, for example, allows more community use of outdoor school recreation facilities during non-school hours.

**Preventive Services.** Ninety-seven percent of CTG grant programs are strengthening clinical and community preventive services to address heart disease, tobacco use, dental care, diabetes and cancer. In Iowa, CTG targets preventive services to 26 rural counties that have high stroke mortality rates.

**Healthy and Safe Physical Environments.** Sixty percent of CTG grantees address healthy and safe environments. South Carolina supports 40 worksites statewide that are engaged in the Working Well Program, which gives employees increased access to healthy choices such as engaging in physical activity during the workday.

**Mental and Emotional Well-Being.** State insurance and public health policy can improve access to mental health services, and 8 percent of CTG grant recipients are addressing social and emotional wellness. Los Angeles County, for example, is working to increase the number of clinic sites within its ambulatory care network that use standard screening protocols for depression and problem drinking and provide brief interventions.

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**Additional Resource**

Community Transformation Grants, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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