

→ Mark your confusion.

→ Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)

→ Write a 250+ word response to the article.

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## The Importance of Health Education

By Marcy Vadurro for Southern New Hampshire University, 02-08-18

When it comes to building a healthy community, the importance of health education cannot be overlooked. Community health workers collaborate with all stakeholders in a community - from its citizens to its government, education and medical officials - to improve health and wellness and ensure equal access to healthcare.

### What is the Importance of Health Education?

Community health education looks at the health of a community as a whole, seeking to identify health issues and trends within a population and work with stakeholders to find solutions to these concerns.

The importance of health education impacts many areas of wellness within a community, including:

- Chronic disease awareness and prevention
- Maternal and infant health
- Tobacco use and substance abuse
- Injury and violence prevention
- Mental and behavioral health
- Nutrition, exercise and obesity prevention

Community health educators work with public health departments, schools, government offices and even local nonprofits to design educational programs and other resources to address a community's specific needs.

"The value in these programs is having a topic or issue tailored to the needs of the audience...and working with them one on one to make behavioral changes," said Daphne Guillaume, a certified health education specialist and public health adjunct faculty at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU).

### Overcoming Health Disparities

In addition to providing educational resources and programming to a community, public health educators also work to ensure all members of a community have equal access to wellness resources and healthcare services.

According to the American Public Health Association (APHA), common health disparities affecting Americans include:

- Racial or ethnic health disparities
- Socioeconomic health disparities
- Gender health disparities
- Rural health disparities

"We look at the issues that are going on in our communities through a social justice lens," said SNHU adjunct faculty member Dede Tete, a certified health education specialist and public health researcher. "The main difference between [public health] and medicine is we don't look at people one by one. We work with communities and examine trends in behaviors and health outcomes. We attempt to decipher what's going on within communities and determine how we can best support their wellness efforts. But we don't act without their input or partnership."

### Community Health Education and Government Policy

The importance of health education also extends into policy and legislation development at a local, state and national level, informing and influencing key decisions that impact community health.

From campaigns and legislation to enforce seat belt use and prevent smoking to programs that boost the awareness and prevention of diabetes, public health workers provide research and guidance to inform policy development.

"You're not just educating the individual person, you need the impetus and motivation to come from the whole community," said SNHU Associate Dean of Health Professions Denise Bisaillon. "You have to reach the leaders in the community. The more people invested in a change, the more likely its success."

### **The Economic Importance of Health Education**

Health education can also boost a community's economy by reducing healthcare spending and lost productivity due to preventable illness.

Obesity and tobacco use, for example, cost the United States billions of dollars each year in healthcare costs and lost productivity.

According to the American Public Health Association (APHA) the annual loss in economic productivity due to obesity and related issues is expected to total as much as \$580 billion by 2030. The total economic cost of tobacco use costs the United States more than \$300 billion each year, including \$156 billion in lost productivity, according to the CDC.

Programs designed to help community members combat these expensive health issues not only boost individuals' health, but also provide a strong return on investment for communities.

According to the CDC, states with strong tobacco control programs see a \$55 return on every \$1 investment, mostly from avoiding costs to treat smoking-related illness. The national cost of offering the National Diabetes Prevention Program is about \$500 per participant, significantly lower than the \$7,900 spent on diabetes care per Type 2 diabetes patient each year.

### **A Growing Field**

As the health, social and economic impacts of community health education continue to grow, so does the field of public health and health promotion.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment in the community health education field is projected to grow by 16% through 2026, more than twice the average for all occupations.

Workers with a community health education degree can find opportunities in a wide variety of settings, according to the BLS, including:

- Schools and colleges
- Hospitals and healthcare facilities
- Nonprofit organizations
- Private businesses and employee wellness programs
- Government organizations and public health departments

As communities continue to focus more on improving the health and wellness of its citizens, the field of community health education will also continue to grow, said SNHU adjunct faculty Michelle Gifford.

"I believe that more and more communities are seeing benefits from wellness-related initiatives and receiving positive marks about them, hence community leaders are seeing this as not just a business-driven necessity, but also something that impacts the well being and quality of life of their citizens," Gifford said.

### **Response option(s):**

- Why might health education be the most valuable class one takes in school?
- In your opinion, what is the most compelling reason to value health education? Least?
- Pick any passage and respond to it.