

Obesity Task Force Success Story

Initiative Name

Scale Back Alabama

Background information

1. What made you decide to begin your initiative?

Over 66.6% of Alabamians are overweight or obese, and Alabama ranks as the 2nd most obese state in the United States. Scale Back Alabama started in 2007 as a public awareness campaign. The statewide program is hosted by Alabama's hospitals and the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), with funding from Barber's Dairies and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama (BCBS).

What type of change did you decide to make and where did it take place? (school, church, worksite, etc.)

2. The 10 week, "semi-internet" based campaign begins in January to coincide with New Year's Resolutions. There is no charge for participating, and teams are eligible to win statewide prizes. Participants compete in teams of 4 and must go to an official weigh-in site at the beginning and end of the program. Hospitals, health departments, churches, and businesses volunteer as official weigh-in sites. Participant/team information is entered into an Internet-based data system at weigh-in sites.

During October, local coordinators sign up to participate and are given access to an online, comprehensive toolkit to assist them in implementing the contest locally. The kit includes handouts, sample news releases, a timeline and the forms necessary for weigh ins. Satellite training is provided to further assist coordinators in understanding their roles; a recording of this training is maintained on the SBA Web site, www.scalebackalabama.com.

The Scale Back Web site, face book page, and weekly e-mails provide health messages, programmatic information, resources links, physical activity opportunities, answers to questions, and success stories. Weekly e-mails have nutrition and physical activity tips and exercise opportunities with a link to the Web site where health lessons are posted. Lessons teach simple lifestyle changes to increase physical activity, increase fruit and vegetable intake, decrease sugar sweetened beverages, reduce high calorie foods, decrease screen time, and reduce portion sizes.

Those who complete the contest, and are on a team which every member loses at least 10 pounds, are placed in a drawing for one of three grand prizes. The top prize is \$1,000 per team member. There are prize drawings for individuals who lose at least 10 pounds, regardless of their team's success, and for completing the program with any weight loss. The drawings are telecasted through satellite coverage.

What was your goal?

The primary goal of the campaign is to create public awareness of the health issues caused by obesity and to encourage Alabamians who are overweight to implement healthier lifestyles. SBA is based on three scientific models. The biomedical model emphasizes health indicators. The behavioral model focuses on health as the product of lifestyle choices, and the social-ecological model's levels of influence is achieved by encouraging personal changes, peer support, and organizational reinforcement.

To assess how the campaign met the goals, there are two post-contest surveys conducted. First, all local coordinators are asked for feedback on the ease of the program and on their opinion of its success with their local participants. Second, all participants are encouraged to take an online survey, which includes questions that assess their achievements in terms of obtaining healthier habits and their satisfaction with the program itself. The questions are developed jointly by the SBA state coordinators and a PhD-level researcher. The participant answers are reviewed by a PhD-level evaluation team from Southern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut. Program successes, evaluations, and lessons learned have been used to refine the program. However, the message remains that a healthy lifestyle is made with small, realistic changes that last.

What resources did you use to help you make the change?

Barber's Dairies and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama both provide donations each year which cover primarily the costs of the Web site and the prizes. In kind support and coordination of the program is donated by the Alabama Hospital Association and the Alabama Department of Public Health. The Alabama State Parks provides incentives to be physically active in parks, and Fresh Air Families provides opportunities for the family to be active together.

Instructions

1. What were the basic steps you took in making the change?

Alabama Hospital Association staff and Alabama Department of Public Health staff worked together to create an innovative program to promote healthy messages. The

program provides places of employment in communities the opportunity to be recognized as a business that cares for its employees, as well as community residents. It also creates a unique partnership between private AL businesses and public entities which fund it and the public agencies and associations which administer it. This effective public-private partnership is the backbone of the program. SBA depends on the volunteer weigh-in sites, and program leaders try to keep the guidelines simple to follow. SBA is different from the typical worksite wellness program because it involves the community.

2. How long did it take for you to see changes?

Weight loss successes were seen the first year; however, statewide culture change will take much longer.

3. How did you know when you were successful?

Data has been collected each year through an online survey of participants and coordinators. All SBA program participants received an e-mail containing a Web link to an anonymous survey. The basic survey questions are kept the same each year, with minor tweaking and a few additional questions added as needed. Lifestyle changes, such as drinking more milk, eating more fruits and vegetables, and being more active have been noted. A report on the results of three years of data collected 2008, 2009, and 2010 was used to explore the impact of various forms of social interaction on participants' success in the intervention. While using a sample of SBA participants, the data set (N = 2,178) provides considerable statistical power. More than half of the 2010 respondents had increased their weekly exercise by up to two days, increased their daily intake of fruits and vegetables and their consumption of dairy products. The multi-item measures of social support and social undermining provided positive and consistent associations with the behavioral outcomes. The conclusion is that social interaction with fellow participants is meaningful to making positive behavioral changes. After analyzing 2008 data, program coordinators changed the 2009 data entry method and the education format from printed lesson plans to video lessons. For 2010, the educational materials changed to short video clips on the web page of successful participants. The 2011 competition was revised to include incentive money for more categories, including a drawing for any individual weight loss. All of these revisions were a result of feedback obtained through the coordinator and participant surveys.

4. What barriers, if any, did you have and how did you overcome them?

The statewide weigh in sites are 100 percent volunteer run. Therefore, each year, there is a challenge finding weigh in sites in every county. In addition to e-mail solicitations to

former coordinators and prospective ones, state coordinators make personal phone calls to find volunteers in areas where there are no weigh in sites.

The other major challenge is that since the program is offered during a specific time of the year, it's often difficult for participants to maintain their healthy habits throughout the year. Contest organizers are constantly looking for ways to keep good health top of mind for participants throughout the year.

Results:

1. What changes occurred?

As noted, each year lifestyle changes, such as drinking more milk, eating more fruits and vegetables, and being more active have been noted on the participant evaluations.

Contact Information:

Name of Organization: Scale Back Alabama

Organizational Sponsors: Alabama Hospital Association, The Alabama Department of Public Health, Barber's Dairies, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

Contact Person Email: info@scalebackalabama.com