YMCA ACTIVATE AMERICA / LESSONS LEARNED

Pioneering Healthier Communities™
"The YMCA is a key CDC partner in developing a healthy communities agenda for the nation because of their great leadership, innovative ideas, credibility, reach, and convening power. I commend them on this initiative."

DR. JULIE GERBERDING, M.D., M.P.H., DIRECTOR OF THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)
June 22, 2006

YMCA of the USA
1101 17th Street, NW Suite 705
Washington, DC 20036

Dear YMCA Leaders,

I am honored to serve as the National Chair of the "YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities" initiative. This ambitious initiative helps us to tackle a very complex problem in our society of poor nutrition and physical inactivity that has led to an epidemic of chronic disease. I am also proud to see so many local, diverse leaders come together to talk about strategies, policies and programs they can accomplish together to build a healthier environment.

This important community initiative comes at a time when we as a country are failing to address the nation’s growing obesity epidemic. Today 65 percent of our population is overweight or obese. Obesity is associated with numerous health problems and increased risks of diabetes, stroke and several types of cancer, to name just a few. If we are serious about getting control of obesity and health care costs associated with chronic diseases, we must give people access to preventive care and the tools they need to stay healthy and stay out of the hospital.

Stemming the tide of obesity and chronic disease will take a sustained commitment from government, schools, communities, employers, health officials, universities, hospitals, the faith community, foundations, business, and community-based non-profits, like the YMCA. The YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative helps build that sustainability and could not come at a more opportune time in our nation’s history.

Because I believe that government has the responsibility to help individuals, children, families and the larger community have the information, tools and incentives they need to take charge of their own health and shift our paradigm to one of prevention, I am pleased to have secured over $2.8 million for the YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities project so far, thus enabling 35 communities—including Des Moines and Marshalltown, Iowa—to provide tools to individuals to help them stay healthy and fit.

At the federal level, I have introduced the "Healthy Lifestyle and Prevention America Act" (HeLP America Act) in Congress with the same goal in mind. The HeLP America Act is comprehensive approach that harnesses the power of prevention to reorient our health care system away from one focused on disease treatment and management to one that is based upon the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the prevention of chronic disease. This legislation promotes healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious foods, being physically active, avoiding tobacco use, and ensuring access to mental health services to prevent or control the devastating efforts of many chronic diseases.

The YMCA’s role here in Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities is as a convener of leaders from schools, workplaces and communities around healthy eating and active living. And in doing this, the YMCA is taking their leadership to a new level and helping us make wellness a true national priority. Therefore, I look forward to continuing to work with the YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative and spreading this community leadership strategy to more sites across the country. By doing so, together we can empower more leaders to make change locally in their schools, workplaces and communities.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin
United States Senator
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President and CEO of YMCA of the USA
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Obesity is one of the most pervasive health threats to our society. Early intervention will equip young people with needed resources and knowledge so they can lead healthier, happier lives. I appreciate the Pioneering Healthier Communities’ efforts to encourage healthy lifestyles in young people and provide them with the information and opportunities to reverse the trends in physical inactivity and obesity. Fort Worth’s FitFuture has done a particularly good job in their community mobilization effort to unite individuals, schools, healthcare professionals, local governments, community organizations, faith communities, and employers to improve health and reduce the prevalence of obesity.

REPRESENTATIVE KAY GRANGER (R-TX)
I am pleased to share this “lessons learned” report on the YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities™ initiative. This report focuses on 13 communities, convened by their YMCAs, that have come together to reduce community barriers and increase supports for healthy living for their residents. But first I want to acknowledge that YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities would not be possible without the generous support of key champions in Congress, especially Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) who serves as Chair of the initiative and has secured substantial resources for this effort at the federal level. I also want to thank our corporate partners and expert advisors for their support and deep understanding of the importance of this community leadership strategy for healthy eating and active living. You will learn more about these organizations throughout this report.

Launched in 2004, the work of these 13 communities has already provided promising examples of the changes that can be made when community leaders and organizations work together toward common goals. The Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative has attracted the participation of such leaders as mayors, state legislators, county commissioners, public health officials, superintendents, university professors, hospital executives, business leaders, and leaders of foundations and other not-for-profit organizations. With this type of leadership, these community teams are well positioned to affect the meaningful change needed to address the serious public health crisis of obesity in this country.

The Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative is part of an overall national effort, called YMCA Activate America™, being led by YMCA of the USA, the national resource office for this country’s 2,617 YMCAs. This is the YMCA movement’s response to America’s growing obesity, chronic disease, and health care crisis. As the nation’s oldest and largest community-based organization with a mission dedicated to health and wellness, the YMCA movement is uniquely qualified and positioned to make a major impact on this crisis by promoting and supporting healthier living for millions of Americans. You will read more about this exciting initiative in this report.

The lessons from the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative have been valuable as YMCA of the USA aims to spread this community-based strategy to all 50 states. In 2005, 22 additional communities were selected to be a part of this effort, and in 2006, 13 additional communities were chosen. It is our goal to spread this model to as many communities in as many states as possible and, in turn, to have a significant impact on the health of Americans and their communities.

Best,

Neil Nicoll
President and CEO of YMCA of the USA
FROM ITS INCEPTION IN 2004, the YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative has aimed to empower local communities with proven strategies and models that will allow them to create and sustain positive, lasting change around healthy living. At that time, 13 communities embarked down this path, assembling a diverse sector of local leaders who are committed to joining this national movement to shift America’s culture around healthy eating and active living. Because many of the actual causes of obesity and chronic diseases stem from individuals’ behavior as well as the social and environmental circumstances in which they live, YMCAs are taking the approach that changing the community environment to support healthy living will have a profound impact on the choices people make toward their own health. This premise is supported by the results of an online survey of 1,086 adults conducted in November 2005 by Greenfield Online on behalf of YMCA of the USA. The survey revealed that 7 out of 10 Americans believe their community environment influences their level of physical activity and overall health. More than half (56 percent) of survey respondents ranked walkable routes in the community as the first or second most important factor positively influencing their physical activity, followed by access to local parks (28 percent) and community bike paths (26 percent). Thus, these 13 Pioneering Healthier Communities have begun creating these types of changes through various strategies, programs, and policies. In doing so, several important lessons have emerged.

CREATING CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES

Scores of communities have applied to participate in the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative. This is consistent with the experiences of the federal government and of several prominent foundation initiatives that have limited, dedicated resources to these initiatives. Committed leaders who are willing to jump-start change are worth their weight in gold. Harnessing this eagerness to drive change is crucial, and in doing so it is important to engage a diverse, multi-sector approach involving government (local, state, and federal), education (superintendents, universities, and K–12 schools), healthcare (hospitals, doctors, and insurance companies), transportation, food-related industries (restaurants and grocery stores), religion (houses of worship and faith-based groups), parks and recreation departments, and foundations and not-for-profit organizations as well as health-related not-for-profits. This diversity is necessary and key as city planners work alongside architects, public health officials, and community groups to ensure that when developing a new subdivision, for example, there are safe and walkable sidewalks, trails, and bike paths for public use.
SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES

Another emerging lesson from the first round of the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative is to ensure sustainability. These sectors must have a sense of ownership, an investment, and an understanding of their own potential to impact the problems and to promote healthier living in the community. This will keep the team engaged and focused on reaching its ultimate goal. Each community was given a small, one-time start-up grant. Most, if not all, found additional resources within their communities, creating sustainability. Finally, for long-lasting change there must be a structure in place and a means to spread that structure to surrounding communities or neighborhoods. This can be done through trainings, mentoring, and leadership.

CREATING A LEGACY IN COMMUNITIES

The ultimate goal of the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative is to create a legacy that is evolutionary and will last for generations. This can be achieved once there is trust and a shared vision among community leaders. While it is a very common first step to establish new health and wellness programs, it is important to note that programs alone do not create culture change. Creating a legacy also requires policy and systems changes that have an impact on the entire population. This is not something that is quickly achieved and, in fact, could take years.

For example, look at tobacco and how it has taken decades for our culture to support policy changes from tobacco taxes to bans against smoking in public places. It required changing the mindset of Americans and giving them a better understanding of the health consequences associated with smoking. It is in this vein that the participating communities have begun their work to create a cultural shift that supports active community environments and food systems that make healthy eating and active living the preferred option.
OBESITY TRENDS* AMONG U.S. ADULTS
BRFSS, 1985
(*BMI ≥ 30, or ~ 30 lbs overweight for a 5' 4" person)

Source: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, CDC

OBESITY TRENDS* AMONG U.S. ADULTS
BRFSS, 2004
(*BMI ≥ 30, or ~ 30 lbs overweight for a 5' 4" person)
America’s Health Crisis

OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, unhealthy behaviors, including physical inactivity and unhealthy eating, have led to an epidemic of obesity and related chronic disease in the United States. Today, obesity is associated with a series of chronic health conditions—including Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, breast cancer, colon cancer, gallbladder disease, arthritis, sleep disturbances, and breathing problems1—putting the United States in the middle of a serious health crisis and reducing the quality of life of millions of Americans. In addition to the chronic diseases and health conditions associated with obesity, being obese is also associated with a lower health-related quality of life. If we fail to curb this obesity epidemic, the youth today will likely have a lower life expectancy than their parents, which will be reversing a trend that has been increasing for nearly two centuries2.

Obesity significantly increases the risk of serious chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers. In the United States, obesity is related to approximately:

- 2/3 of Type 2 diabetes;
- 2/3 of heart disease; and
- 15 percent of cancer in men, and 20 percent of cancer in women3.

Here are a few startling statistics worth highlighting:

- For children born in the U.S. in 2000, one in three will develop diabetes in their lifetime, and Latino females are impacted even more – 1 in 2 will develop diabetes4.
- 65 percent of all people age 20 and older are overweight or obese5. Since 1991, the prevalence of obesity among adults has increased by more than 75 percent.
- More than 50% of U.S. adults do not get enough physical activity to make a difference in their health6.
- During 2005, a total of only 36% of high school students met currently recommended levels of physical activity on ≥ 5 days a week.

> During 2005, 80% of high school students had not eaten 5 or more fruits and vegetables daily and 67% did not attend physical education classes daily.8

> Based on figures from 2000, health problems related to obesity cost American society an estimated $117 billion a year due to direct health care costs, as well as the indirect economic costs of lost productivity9. While this figure is alarming, what is even more disturbing is that hospital costs related to childhood obesity alone have tripled in the last 20 years10.

Although chronic diseases are extremely prevalent in our society, much of the chronic disease burden is preventable. Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating contribute to many chronic diseases—including cancer, heart disease, and diabetes—and obesity. Studies show that the leading contributors to early deaths are directly related to behavior and the socio-economic and physical environments in which we live. In fact, 60 percent of all premature deaths can be linked to behavior, social, and environmental factors, while only 10 percent of what creates health is associated with clinical care11.

In order to curb this epidemic, it is critical to promote regular physical activity and healthy eating, and build environments that support these behaviors.

More Americans need to increase their activity levels and consume healthier foods, and living in a healthy community that promotes these behaviors would allow Americans to do so more easily. Proven strategies exist to accomplish this: incorporating sidewalks, bike trails, traffic calming, and mixed-use development into communities’ physical design so more people can safely be active; requiring schools to offer more nutritious items for meals and opportunities for physical activity; and providing more time for employees to exercise during their lunch break or throughout the day. As a society, we need to ensure that these strategies are adopted more broadly so it is easier for all Americans, young and old, to have an active lifestyle and eat healthier.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Obesity in the News: Helping Consumers Clear the Confusion (Background Q&A). April 29, 2005.
6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Surveillance Summaries, December 2, 2005: MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-5).
7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Surveillance Summaries, June 9, 2006: MMWR 2006; 55 (No. SS-5).
8 Ibid.
YMCA’s Long-Standing Commitment to Health and Wellness

FOR MORE THAN 152 YEARS, YMCAs have been strengthening communities and helping people grow in spirit, mind, and body. George Williams founded the YMCA in 1844 to create a positive alternative to London’s unsavory diversions for young men like himself. While wholesome recreation is redefined for each generation, YMCAs have always provided a sense of belonging, people who care, a choice of activities that build skills, and a place to have fun. As a result, today America’s 2,617 YMCAs are collectively the largest not-for-profit providers of community-based health and wellness programs in the country and are accessible to all people, regardless of physical abilities or income levels.

YMCAs are also at the heart of community life, especially when it comes to building healthy individuals and communities. YMCAs are collectively the largest provider of child care programs, providing high-quality, affordable care to more than 500,000 children. America’s YMCAs have a deep-rooted presence in thousands of communities coast-to-coast. Serving 20.1 million people, the 50,000 full- and part-time staff and almost 600,000 volunteers engage themselves in programs and services, build community collaborations, and raise money for scholarships, ensuring financial assistance for those unable to pay.

Throughout its history, YMCAs have had the ability to bring about many great organizational programs—programs it started, nurtured, and shared, such as basketball and child care. In December 1891, at the International YMCA Training School in Springfield, Massachusetts, Dr. Luther Gulick (the school’s director) gave young physical education teacher James Naismith just weeks to come up with a winter game. After hanging peach baskets from the bottom of a second-level running track, Naismith tacked 13 rules to the wall and taught the men his game: basketball. Other sports, such as volleyball, racquetball, and swimming, also had similar beginnings at YMCAs.

In the 1960s, YMCA youth workers noticed that teens often cared for younger siblings while their parents worked, so YMCAs responded by organizing high-quality, affordable child care for kids of all ages. YMCAs pioneered afterschool child care before the term latch-key kid was widely used. Today 84 percent of YMCA school-age programs are located in schools, and many YMCAs receive support from local school boards to provide afterschool programs.

YMCAs have a proven, powerful combination of autonomy, creativity, and practicality and have a solid commitment to improving communities. YMCAs have always had the flexibility to change and try new things, to be pioneers. This puts YMCAs in a unique position to help convene those leaders that can get us out of the health crisis our country faces.

YMCA ACTIVATE AMERICA

Given the magnitude of the problem and the large presence of YMCAs around the country, YMCA of the USA decided to spearhead an initiative to improve activities already underway at YMCAs and to focus on helping people increase their physical activity and consume nutritious foods. In 2004 YMCA of the USA launched YMCA Activate America, a national initiative with a goal of advancing the reality of healthy living for millions of kids, families, and their communities.

YMCAs have an enormous potential and obligation through their mission to touch even more lives and create healthier environments for their communities. In fact, approximately 72 million households are located within three miles of a YMCA. To advance this goal, YMCAs are focusing on three components that make up YMCA Activate America: organizational improvement, community leadership, and strategic partnerships.

A TRACK RECORD OF PIONEERING PROGRAMS

1881 Boston’s YMCAs’ Robert J. Roberts coins the term “bodybuilding.”
1885 Sumner Dudley founds the nation’s oldest continuously operating YMCA camp, known today as Camp Dudley. Also, the world’s first indoor swimming pool is built at Brooklyn (NY) Central YMCA.
1889 James Naismith invents basketball at the International YMCA Training School (Springfield, MA). Dr. Luther Gulick designs the YMCA logo, an equilateral triangle to show balance of spirit, mind, and body.
1895 William G. Morgan of Holyoke (MA) YMCA invents volleyball.
1906  George Corsan of Toronto, hired by Detroit YMCA, revolutionizes water safety and teaching with mass swimming lessons.

1950  First racquetball game led by its inventor, Joe Sobek, at Greenwich (CT) YMCA.

1970 / 1971  Jackie Sorenson begins “dance exercise” classes at the Towson (MD) YMCA, leading to the boom in “aerobic dancing” in the U.S.

“Y’s Way to Physical Fitness” program establishes national fitness testing standard.

1976  YMCA launches nationwide cardiovascular health program.
“America On the Move commends the work of these 13 community teams as they have recognized the vital importance of helping Americans see the value of taking “small steps” to achieve healthy lifestyles.”

Dr. Jim O. Hill, Ph.D., Co-founder and Chair of America On the Move

1986 YMCA of the USA introduces “YMCA Fitness Leaders,” a standard program for training and certifying fitness instructors.

1992 YMCA Healthy Kids® Day to encourage healthy development of youth; it becomes an annual April event.

2004 YMCA of the USA, with the help of senators Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Tom Harkin (D-IA), unveils Pioneer Healthier Communities initiative, a signature piece of YMCA Activate America™. The first 13 communities were selected to participate.

Twenty-one YMCA associations commit to being part of an internal organizational transformation effort, known as the “Gulick Project,” another key component of YMCA Activate America.
Organizational Improvement

The Gulick Project is an effort to transform the way YMCAs work directly with individuals and families to support healthy living, embedding evidence-based strategies into all YMCA activities. The project is named after Luther Gulick, an early YMCA health and wellness pioneer. The Gulick Project is driving operational and programmatic innovations at YMCAs to enhance the ability to work effectively with two key audiences: adult health seekers and their families and school-age youth and their families.

Community Leadership

This component of YMCA Activate America is a public outreach strategy that strengthens the ability of YMCAs to be catalysts and leaders for community initiatives on healthy living. Three signature programs of community leadership are Pioneering Healthier Communities (which this report focuses on), YMCA Healthy Kids® Day, and America On the Move. YMCA Healthy Kids Day encourages children and families to adopt behaviors that support healthy living through fun, engaging, and creative activities.

This is an event that is held each spring at over 1,400 YMCAs nationwide. America On the Move is a strategy to engage leaders and partners in helping people become more active. America On the Move at the YMCA, which will be held across the country September 23–30, 2006, is an effort to get all Americans moving more through all types of activities, including walking, swimming, biking, and basketball. More than 900 YMCAs have committed to hosting this event.

Strategic Partnerships

Strategic partnerships magnify the impact of both the organizational improvement and community leadership components by partnering with national, public, private, philanthropic, academic, and research organizations to promote healthy living. Strategic partners that provide expertise to YMCA Activate America include Harvard School of Public Health, Stanford University School of Medicine, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Bush administration’s signature health and wellness program—Steps to a HealthierUS, America On the Move, and corporate partners such as PepsiCo, Kimberly-Clark Corporation, and JCPenney Afterschool.

YMCA of the USA is selected to serve as lead national partner on the President’s Steps to a HealthierUS, engaging 40 YMCAs across the country.

2005 The Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative spreads to an additional 22 communities—bringing the total number of communities participating in the initiative to 35.

2006 YMCA of the USA continues spreading the Pioneering Healthier Communities project and is on its way to spreading to all 50 states by selecting 13 additional communities—bringing the total number of communities involved to 48. An additional nine YMCA associations become part of the “Gulick Project.”

YMCA of the USA engages all local YMCA associations on YMCA Activate America through regional meetings in early 2006. By June 2006, over 600 YMCA associations, representing over 2,000 branches make a commitment to become Activate America YMCAs.
History and Vision for YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities Initiative

THE CONCEPT FOR THE Pioneering Healthier Communities Initiative derives from the YMCA mission to respond to societal needs. In 2004 YMCA of the USA engaged several corporate partners to discuss the need to develop a community-driven project to address the rising public health crisis. Given the YMCA history, mission, and community strength, this effort would put YMCAs in a unique position to play an integral role in jump-starting healthy and sustainable community leadership while changing health strategies across the country.

YMCA of the USA began by looking at current federal and foundation resources and community models that were proven to be successful (i.e., the federal government’s REACH and Steps to a HealthierUS programs and the Active Living by Design program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation). While important programs with powerful lessons, additional efforts were required to rapidly equip all of our nation’s communities with the tools they need to advance healthy eating and active living strategies.

CDC’s National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion—the organization leading the federal effort to prevent the nation’s leading causes of death—has made great progress over the last decade, building programs and policies at the state level and, to a lesser degree at the community level, to prevent and control these killers and has great success stories to profile. Yet many states still lack basic funding for the prevention of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. And federal funding for chronic disease prevention in states and communities does not begin to reflect the urgency of the health crisis in America and the need to rapidly disseminate programs and policy strategies that work.

While YMCA of the USA supports and fights for efforts in Congress to increase CDC’s resources to states and communities, it became very clear that YMCAs could also play a parallel role in spreading the types of proven strategies and models already in existence while bringing better awareness to kids, families, and individuals about healthy lifestyles.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

Before launching Pioneering Healthier Communities in July 2004, YMCA of the USA brought together key stakeholders and partner organizations in the public health community for input. This group of 45 experts and leaders provided standards for structuring this initiative, such as the importance of testing the feasibility of our approach, the need to set reasonable expectations for our communities, the criteria for identifying communities for the initiative, and key additional focus areas for our communities.

In addition, these key stakeholders provided great insight into how essential it was for teams to begin certain activities prior to attending the Pioneering Healthier Communities conference, including:

> Building their community leadership teams;
> Identifying their community assets and strengths;
> Building collaborative partnerships.

Finally, the group believed it was very important that the community teams:

CDC is a proud supporter and partner of the YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities project and commends the YMCA for its creativity and leadership in promoting health and wellness nationwide. The YMCA is uniquely positioned to promote health both within its walls and beyond to the thousands of communities in which it resides.

JANET COLLINS, PhD, DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND HEALTH PROMOTION AT THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)
> Gain support from elected officials;
> Engage nontraditional partners (especially partners outside the public health field, e.g., transportation, housing, etc.);
> Be willing to serve as mentors for other mobilized communities;
> Make a commitment to sustain their efforts;
> Have the support of local charitable and educational institutions.

As a result of these discussions, the majority of the national stakeholders committed to provide substantial in-kind resources to the YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities effort, including program support, technical assistance, and consultation; training; materials; speakers; local member and affiliate involvement in the participating communities; help linking communities to other resources; communication strategies; planning assistance; evaluation; and access to and understanding of existing funding mechanisms. This commitment has helped make this initiative powerful, important, and successful.

### SELECTION OF COMMUNITIES

Determining the community selection process was certainly one of the most important aspects of building this initiative. As mentioned earlier, there were already similar federal government and foundation projects that were providing proven solutions and models, so the YMCA of the USA wanted to expand the reach of proven strategies. It was clear from the stakeholders meeting that the selection criteria should include:

> Regional variety: urban, rural, and suburban
> Hard-to-reach populations (low-income, underserved, racial and ethnic populations)
> Regional/geographic diversity across the country
> Active leadership
> Strong local YMCA leadership
> Strong leadership teams that fully represent all sectors of the community, have a record of community collaboration, and have a track record in fundraising to support programs

"An integral part of any health care plan is to encourage people to adopt the habits necessary to avoid disease in the first place. And that’s what we’re here to talk about, and that is what the YMCA does, and I’m grateful for that."

**PRESIDENT BUSH** LAUNCHING THE "PRESIDENT’S CHALLENGE" AT THE YMCA OF METROPOLITAN DALLAS
VISION OF A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

In 1999 the U.S. Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities (now known as the Association for Community Health Improvement) identified hundreds of communities across the country that had made tangible progress toward improving health. These communities participated in one of 300 dialogues, which served as a participatory research effort to identify the essential patterns that led to their programmatic success. What emerged from these dialogues was the awareness that a healthy community is not just a random outcome of various factors; instead, it is the result of caring, committed individuals joining together in an ambitious shared effort. And when this joining together is most successful, there are seven common patterns that emerge, articulating what creates health and improves quality of life in a community. A healthy community:

> **Practices ongoing dialogue.** Communities begin the process of improving health and quality of life by having effective conversations with local residents to identify common goals.

> **Shapes its future.** Communities set clear objectives and understand that there are valuable resources in their communities they can harness. Communities and their leaders also understand the important effects that economic development and environmental issues have on their future well-being.

> **Generates leadership everywhere.** Communities recognize and support the leadership potential of all their members, including new leaders, especially among young people and older adults. Effective leaders recognize and facilitate discussion, encourage collaboration, and build strong coalitions and relationships.

> **Embraces diversity.** Communities recognize that to succeed in improving overall health and well-being they must include all segments of the community in their efforts. And diversity—whether racial, economic, age, or sexual orientation—is a potent source of vitality, strength, and renewal.

> **Knows itself.** Communities must collect and use information effectively.

> **Connects people and resources.** Communities must recognize that an accessible, resource-rich environment contributes to healthier and more satisfying lives.

> **Creates a sense of community.** Communities recognize that when people feel strongly connected with each other, they are more likely to act in the interests of the entire community. This is about building bridges of trust.

In envisioning the design and implementation of Pioneering Healthier Communities, YMCA of the USA incorporated these seven patterns of a healthy community. And, these seven patterns are the basis upon which YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities teams design and implement their initiatives. In fact, when YMCAs apply to become a part of this initiative, they are asked to describe how they will make these patterns and practices a part of their project and of their community.

1 Healthy Community Agenda, with the Seven Patterns of a Healthy Community, Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities (Norris and Pittman, 2000)

“\n
The YMCA’s physical infrastructure, dedicated staff and recognized trust in communities makes them an ideal convener for this type of work. They have brought together those community leaders necessary to build culture and policy change needed to support healthy living in communities.”

TYLER NORRIS, PRESIDENT AND CEO, COMMUNITY INITIATIVES AND YMCA CONSULTANT
GOALS FOR PIONEERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

Using the guidance of the stakeholders and building on the lessons of previous federal government and foundation efforts to support community programs, YMCA of the USA determined the goals of this initiative were to:

- Raise awareness and strengthen the framework for community-wide and national movements among all sectors of society to reverse the trends in physical inactivity, obesity, and other unhealthy lifestyles
- Find cost-effective ways to educate and mobilize communities and replicate the success of community-based initiatives underway at the national level
- Identify practical and sustainable solutions and tools for healthy living and informed decision making that communities across the country can replicate and implement
- Build complementary community, state, and national efforts that improve their chances of succeeding
- Develop and initiate broad public policy priorities for all sectors of communities, states, and the nation

To meet these goals and ensure the community teams were off to the right start, each YMCA selected would pick 8 to 10 diverse community leaders to join their effort, with one member serving as a team coach. These community leaders would travel to Washington, D.C., for a YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities conference to learn about proven prevention and intervention strategies from national experts. In addition, each team coach would be required to travel to Washington before the conference for a training in how to develop a strategy and how to design their work around the seven patterns of a healthy community.

THE BEGINNING OF A MOVEMENT: BUILDING A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

On September 8, 2004, driven by a mandate to mobilize meaningful changes to reverse the nation’s declining health, more than 140 delegates—composed of civic leaders in government, business, health, and other sectors from 13 communities and regions across the country—assembled in Washington, D.C., for the first annual YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities National Conference. Enriched by the knowledge of proven behavior modification strategies, conference attendees were empowered to return to their hometowns with a uniform commitment to develop and implement community-based solutions to help reverse locally what has become epidemic: the nation’s physical inactivity, unhealthy eating, and rise in obesity.

The participating delegations featured a prestigious lineup of local leaders: elected officials including mayors, state senators, and city council persons; state and local directors of public health; business leaders; and representatives from foundations, national insurance companies, financial institutions, and grocery store chains. Schools and hospitals were also a part of the community-wide collaborations.

The conference featured more than 30 experts from government, philanthropic, and academic circles. For example, senior officials from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised delegates along with high-level representatives from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health.

YMCA PIONEERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE GARNERS SUPPORT FROM CONGRESS

The Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative was launched at a U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education on July 15, 2004. This committee is chaired by Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Tom Harkin (D-IA). Both of these senators have been very supportive of this initiative, and Senator Harkin serves as an honorary chair of Pioneering Healthier Communities. In fiscal year 2005, Senator Harkin was able to secure $1.48 million for the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative. Each of the 13 communities received $75,000 to help support their community projects. The rest of the money was used to spread the initiative to an additional 22 communities in 2005, and ongoing funding has continued.

In addition to Senators Specter and Harkin, many other members of Congress are extremely supportive of continuing funding for this effort. Furthermore, President Bush has included this programmatic funding in his budgets for Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007.
Left: Vernon Delpesce, President and CEO of YMCA of Greater Des Moines, Iowa and Eric Mann, President and CEO of YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh at the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, July 2004. Center: Tommy Thompson, Former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, at the first Pioneering Healthier Communities Conference, September 2004. Right: Ken Gladish, Former President and CEO of YMCA of the USA, testifying at the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, July 2004.
Obesity and unhealthy living seriously threaten the wellness of this nation. Encouraging communities to promote active lifestyles and make health-conscious decisions is the most effective way to combat this disease. I am pleased to see the progress these communities have made since the introduction of the YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative before the LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee in July 2004.

SENATOR ARLEN SPECTER (R-PA), CHAIRMAN OF THE LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE; ALSO PICTURED SENATOR TOM HARKIN (D-IA), RANKING MEMBER OF THE LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE AND CHAIR OF PIONEERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE
Lessons Learned

In Public Health, the greatest challenge to behavior change is the lack of readiness of the individual to make that change. However, we do not confront this challenge when it comes to community readiness—thousands of communities are ready to change. The challenge lies in creating a change that is sustainable. Ultimately, creating lasting change leaves behind a legacy for communities, creating a culture that supports healthy living for children, families, and individuals for generations.

Since these 13 communities embarked on the YMCA Activate America: Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative, several important lessons about creating and sustaining change have emerged. These 10 lessons are not only helping to guide additional communities participating in the initiative but can help others who are developing and implementing community-based healthy living strategies.

1. Communities are hungry for change and are searching for guidance and leadership to tackle this big issue. As headlines continue to put the rise of obesity and chronic diseases on the front page, communities have developed a deep-rooted concern about the need to impact the health of all citizens. In turn, this has stirred many community leaders to want to take bold and quick action. To understand just how hungry communities are to make change locally, take a look at the number of communities that have attempted to secure one of the federal and foundation grants that are enabling communities to begin a process of change toward healthier living. Specifically, look at the federally funded community health programs, including the Steps to a HealthierUS program and the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program.

Several hundred communities applied for these grants, and only 70 were funded, due not to the quality of the applications or lack of interest in funding these projects but to limited resources. A similar response occurred when the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation announced its Active Living by Design program and received more than 960 applications for just 25 slots. Other foundations have recently been funding projects as well, with similar responses to their announcements. And the same trend was true when YMCA of the USA accepted applications for expanding its Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative.

There were 100 YMCA applications for only 22 slots for the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative in 2005, and YMCA of the USA is supporting 13 teams in 2006, or about 20 percent of this year’s applicants. But regardless of the limited funding, communities are so desperate for change that they are prepared to undertake lengthy applications in hope of securing some level of resources to get things going locally.

2. Engaging community leaders who have influence and clout is key to jump-starting change. Policymakers can use the bully pulpit to raise awareness about the problem or to change policies through legislation. For example, governors can influence the public health budgets of their states and mayors can influence planning and zoning laws. Business executives can allow more time during the workday for employees to participate in physical activity. Superintendents and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) can influence food contracts to enhance offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains. Chief executive officers of community-based organizations can put healthier foods and beverages in their vending machines.

TEN LESSONS LEARNED

1. Communities are hungry for change and are searching for guidance and leadership to tackle this big issue.
2. Engaging community leaders who have influence and clout is key to jump-starting change.
3. Communities are willing to support change with smaller amounts of resources in addition to in-kind resources and technical assistance.
4. Beyond a readiness for change, communities need tools, technical assistance, and expert advice to determine the right strategies to improve healthy eating and active living.
Steps to a HealthierUS (Steps) is an initiative from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that advances the Administration’s HealthyUS goal of helping Americans live longer, better, and healthier lives. Recognizing that small changes over time can yield dramatic results, the Steps initiative is designed to identify and promote efforts that encourage people to make small behavior changes to reduce the burden of some of the leading causes of death, including heart disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and cancer.

A centerpiece of this initiative is the 5-year Steps Cooperative Agreement Program (Steps Program). Through this program, states, cities, and tribal entities receive funds ranging from $500,000 to $1,500,000 to implement chronic disease prevention efforts focused on reducing the burden of diabetes, obesity, and asthma and addressing three related risk behaviors—physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use. In Fiscal Year 2006, Steps was funded at $44.3 million.

In 2004, the Steps Program funded YMCA of the USA ($500,000 per year for 4 years) to help increase the capacity of the Steps community grantees through conferences, mini-grants, and formal partnerships with local YMCAs. In this capacity, YMCA of the USA serves as the lead national partner on the Steps to a HealthierUS program. This partnership involves 18 national organizations that serve on a YMCA/Steps National Steering Committee that collaborates to support the communities.

Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) 2010 is one of the cornerstones of CDC’s efforts to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health. REACH 2010 is designed to eliminate disparities in the following six priority areas: cardiovascular disease, immunizations, breast and cervical cancer screening and management, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and infant mortality. The racial and ethnic groups targeted by REACH 2010 are African Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders. For Fiscal Year 2006, CDC received $34.3 million.

3. Communities are willing to support change with smaller amounts of resources in addition to in-kind resources and technical assistance. YMCA of the USA’s approach with Pioneering Healthier Communities is somewhat different from the leading federal and foundation initiatives. The YMCA model relies on the community’s desire for change to motivate local funding support and sustainability for the community change efforts. Communities that are chosen to participate in Pioneering Healthier Communities receive a one-time start-up grant (ranging from $35,000 to $75,000) for their activities in the second year of the initiative—not the first year—and YMCA of the USA encourages them to secure matching resources and future funding from local foundations and business groups. YMCA of the USA is also confident that leading federal and foundation investments in larger, better-funded community pilots will continue to provide the engine for ongoing best practices in evidence-based programs and policies that Pioneering Healthier Communities sites can replicate and disseminate locally. It is important to note that many of these federal and foundation grants are multi-year commitments, not just one-time funding.

5. Diverse community teams representing the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors contribute to ensuring success.

6. Communities that ensure participation of leaders from diverse sectors and give them ownership will ultimately build sustainability in their work.

7. To ensure sustainability of the initiatives, it is essential that the individual goals of each sector are not lost in promoting the loftier goals of the team effort.

8. A system or structure of spreading success helps ensure sustainability.
4. Beyond a readiness for change, communities need tools, technical assistance, and expert advice to determine the right strategies to improve healthy eating and active living. Creating change in communities requires technical assistance in terms of evaluation, partnerships, programs, and policy strategies that work. To initiate comprehensive leadership that leads to healthy communities, expert advice is needed as well. Community leaders know and understand there is an obesity crisis in their communities and throughout the country. However, determining what technical assistance or expert advice is needed to adopt strategies, programs, and policies that will have the most impact or are the most feasible for them is challenging. Expert advice is important because political, civic, and other community leaders often find that there is not just one solution. Building one sidewalk in a high-traffic area will not make people healthier, but creating safe walking routes to schools, making fresh fruits and vegetables accessible to all in the community, and incorporating physical activity in all afterschool programs will. All of these are evidence-based programs and models that have worked in other communities.

Currently, YMCA of the USA is working with Pioneering Healthier Communities teams, CDC, and leading foundations to identify what communities need to support and sustain their efforts, such as building an information and advocacy infrastructure that can better support the rapid dissemination of policy changes and evidence-based programs, and the simplification of evaluation models.

5. Diverse community teams representing the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors contribute to ensuring success. Communities often fail to organize themselves in a way to appropriately respond to the enormity of this health challenge; instead, their approach is often segmented. Perhaps it’s the result of a patchwork of funding opportunities for projects such as building roads with bike lanes, enhancing physical activity in schools, preventing and controlling disease, improving trails, and promoting healthy eating, or maybe it is simply the lack of time to bring all the diverse and relevant partners to the table. However, most successful Pioneering Healthier Communities teams have recognized the importance of bringing the most diverse team to the table. By doing so, organizations that specialize in program design and delivery, policy and regulatory change, communications, urban planning and design, and evaluation are all at the table, as well as organizations with access to large populations, including schools, businesses, and community groups. By bringing all sectors together—government, education, public health, healthcare, parks and recreation departments, faith-based organizations, businesses, food providers, media, colleges and universities, and transportation officials—no one entity will be charged with confronting this problem on its own. This gives the team a community-wide approach with the type of community leadership needed to make decisions that will impact change.

TEN LESSONS LEARNED (CONTINUED)

9. Lasting change is evolutionary.

10. The ultimate goal is systems and policy changes that impact us all.
Many of our local public health officers have been proud members of the Pioneering Healthier Communities teams as they work to shift culture changes in communities nationwide. By participating in this important work, it has allowed public health officers the opportunity to connect with those community leaders that can help ensure success in creating healthier communities for individuals, kids, and families.

GEORGES C. BENJAMIN, MD, FACP, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

6. Communities that ensure participation of leaders from diverse sectors and give them ownership will ultimately build sustainability into their work. Teams that empower their partners to own this work, either through a financial, human, or organizational investment, are better able to sustain the motivation, work, and commitment needed to create a culture change in support of healthy living.

Several participating teams have leveraged the staff, funding, and creative energy of their partners to take their local initiative to the next level. Their work has become about embedding change through programs, policies, and strategies. For example, one team has trained dozens of volunteers to deliver healthy eating and active living curriculums in schools, camps, and afterschool programs; others are building models that require each organization to make healthy eating and active living changes in their own organizations, and are setting standards for all other organizations in their sectors.

The goal has been to build the community leadership capacity for change at the local level, including the leadership to seek out strategies and resources to support the work.

7. To ensure sustainability of the initiatives, it is essential that the individual goals of each sector are not lost in promoting the loftier goals of the team effort. Team members and their respective organizations have their own goals for participating in this work. An employer may want to reduce health care costs in their business while a produce distributor’s goal may be to expand the distribution of their fruits and vegetables to employees in the corporate sector. A hospital or pediatrician’s office may be trying to find a “prescription” for children they diagnose as severely overweight, while nutritionists are eager to use a community-based facility in which kids can be educated about healthy eating and active living. Neighbors may want to walk more, but fear for their safety due to high crime rates, while the police department may identify the need to build deeper connections to a neighborhood as key to fighting crime.

Organizations enter this effort with diverse goals, which taken together support the ultimate goal. Similarly, member organizations may have their own work going on in this arena that they want to lift up as part of a larger effort. Teams are challenged with the need to honor each other’s goals and recognize that each team member brings something unique to the table, while bringing everyone together around shared work and shared goals that do not sacrifice the individual goals of member organizations.
8. A system or structure of spreading success helps ensure sustainability. By building dissemination capacity, including leadership skills and competencies, proven strategies can be replicated at multiple sites. Organizations with multiple sites or branches, such as YMCAs, businesses, schools, hospitals, churches, and senior centers, can enhance their delivery systems through the help of team partners. For example, grocery stores and chefs can bring healthy cooking classes to these sites; businesses can donate refrigerator systems to enable the storage of fresh fruits and vegetables and low-fat milk; public health workers can deliver health screening, nutrition, physical education, and assessment programs; and YMCAs can provide health and wellness programming in worksites, schools, and afterschool settings. Furthermore, if the organizations represented on the team make a commitment to adopting healthier living environments (through policies and programs) at their sites, they make a huge contribution toward sustainability and help ensure that the healthy choice is the easy choice in the community.

9. Lasting change is evolutionary. Programs alone do not create culture change, but they are necessary to build trust among team members and a commitment to a shared vision. Most of the teams have developed a small arsenal of successful programs that are reaching many children, families, older adults, and the community at large with physical activity and healthy eating strategies. Policy and systems change that impacts an entire population, as opposed to reaching only those engaged in programs, is required to create more lasting change. For example, if a school policy restores physical education and activity during the school day, all children could achieve the recommended amount of activity each day. If all new housing developments require sidewalks, bike lanes, and safe crossings, new neighborhoods would provide an opportunity for children to walk to school, families to walk to local dining establishments, and workers to walk or bike to work. Creating sustainable change in a community is not an overnight project. It will take many, if not all, of these communities years to reach a point where they feel they have established a legacy for their communities on healthy living strategies. But in the meantime, a demonstrable impact is being made on the lives of local citizens in participating communities as a result of this community leadership initiative.

10. The ultimate goal is systems and policy changes that impact us all. As cities across America pass regulations banning smoking in restaurants, it brings to mind that just two decades ago our cultural norms supported smoking. It took decades to change Americans’ mindset, awareness, and understanding of the health consequences of tobacco smoke. And similarly, it will take years to change Americans’ mindset and cultural norms with regard to changing our environment to better support physical activity and healthy eating. Americans know they need to eat less and exercise more, but they don’t always connect it to the environment in which they live, as evidenced by the lack of walkable communities, limited public transportation in communities, schools built in a fashion that makes walking neither accessible nor safe, and school lunches that lack fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains as primary options. These are the kinds of systems and policy changes that impact us all and will create a legacy of lasting change.
Active Living by Design has been delighted to provide input to the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative. By contributing our perspectives on the active living and healthy eating movements, we have helped community teams and their leaders understand that local policies and physical environments can either support or be a barrier to healthy living.

SARAH STRUNK, DIRECTOR OF ACTIVE LIVING BY DESIGN—A PROGRAM OF THE ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION
The Road Ahead

In looking at the road ahead for the YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative, there is much promise and opportunity for this initiative to build a pathway for many more American communities to create healthy living. To date, the first 13 Pioneering Healthier Communities are thriving and empowering their communities to create awareness, culture change, and an environment that supports physical activity and healthy eating. The teams are building the social capital necessary to garner more support from the broader community and its citizens, which will help them sustain the change they create. For YMCAs, this is an opportunity to build a national movement that is evidence-based and ultimately is about implementing programs, policies, and strategies that create and support an environment for active living and healthy eating.

As these 13 teams continue down this path, 22 new communities have started building their road to healthier living. In the summer of 2005, YMCA of the USA selected 22 additional communities to join Pioneering Healthier Communities. These 22 communities include: the State of Arkansas; Attleboro, Massachusetts; Central Kentucky; Chester County, Pennsylvania; Clearwater, Florida; Dane County, Wisconsin; Fort Worth, Texas; Greenville, South Carolina; Greater Charlotte, North Carolina; Jackson, Mississippi; Lincoln, Nebraska; Marshall, Minnesota; Marshalltown, Iowa; Orange County, California; Rapid City, South Dakota; Reno, Nevada; Rye, New York; Shreveport, Louisiana; Springfield/Greene County, Missouri; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Tucson, Arizona; and West Michigan. These community teams followed a process similar to that of the 2004 communities and participated in the second YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities conference at the end of 2005. Featured speakers included recognized experts in varying fields, as well as community change agents who have firsthand experience in driving transformations that promote healthier community living.

In August 2006, YMCA of the USA announced the addition of 13 more communities, bringing the total number of participating communities to 48. Like the earlier teams, these new community teams will attend a national conference, build an action plan, and implement change locally. YMCA of the USA has encouraged YMCAs in those states that do not already have a Pioneering Healthier Communities project to apply so this initiative can be spread across the entire country and help support a national movement in community-based change around physical activity and healthy eating. This strategy will continue in years to come, and it is the hope of YMCA of the USA to have numerous initiatives in all 50 states that can serve as mentoring sites to other communities.

“As Co-Chairs of the Congressional Fitness Caucus, we are working to increase awareness about the danger of obesity and are promoting the benefits of physical activity to overall health and wellness. We have championed the Pioneering Healthier Communities project because we support the basic premise that by empowering local leaders with knowledge, tools and start-up resources, we can jump start change and build supportive environments for healthy and active living.”

Representatives Zack Wamp (R-TN) and Mark Udall (D-CO)
YMCA of the USA has also established a training institute in hope of building an ongoing learning environment for these teams. After year one, teams will have the opportunity to attend the institute, where they can continue to learn from one another, get new ideas, and hear about lessons learned in other communities as well as hear about new evidence-based programs and policy strategies. YMCA of the USA hopes that this opportunity will energize, empower, and help communities reach their goal of creating long-lasting, sustainable change. This training institute also gives YMCA of the USA an opportunity to bring in national experts to provide continuing new ideas, guidance, and support for community team projects. The first 13 communities participated in the first training institute this past spring. During this one-day meeting, two representatives from each team came to Washington, D.C., to share their opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. They also heard from Mark Fenton, nationally known speaker and host of the PBS television series America’s Walking, who spoke about the impact teams can have on their community’s built environment. Tyler Norris, head coach and chair of the Active Living by Design project and consultant to YMCA of the USA, challenged the group with an exercise designed to remove barriers that prevent them from reaching their goals. Every day, this initiative continues to teach YMCAs how to better market and communicate this issue to the media and the public. There are several communities that have been able to contribute greatly to public awareness campaigns as well as provide human-interest stories to the public about healthy eating and active living, furthering the education capacity and reach of the project. The partnerships between the media and the community teams will continue to grow in the months and year ahead. And finally, YMCA of the USA has joined leading foundations, corporations, and government to hold a national summit sometime next year that would identify and establish the best tools and practices in support of healthy living and community strategies. While the details of this important conference are still being determined, it is yet another opportunity to infuse and drive programs, policies, and system changes down to the local level. The road ahead is about combining the lessons learned with the process of engaging communities and their leaders; it’s about getting leaders to undertake this hard work and turn it into concrete results while building the power to take on more. Ultimately, healthy eating and active living will be supported and sustained only by empowering local leadership to create the cultural shift necessary to support Americans’ efforts to eat less and move more.

“In the year of our 50th Anniversary of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, we recognize the power of an initiative like the Pioneering Healthier Communities at the community level. The Council looks forward to working with the YMCA and its community teams in the coming year to continue to encourage all Americans to make being active part of their everyday lives.”

MELISSA JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE PRESIDENT’S COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS AND SPORTS
An Overview of the 2004 Participating Communities

YMCA ACTIVATE AMERICA: PIONEERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES is premised on the belief that the most challenging health issues facing communities are not the health issues themselves, but rather the difficulty communities face in organizing themselves to respond effectively to those health challenges. This initiative brings community leaders together to design community strategies that will promote cultural and environmental change that is supportive of healthy lifestyles. Accordingly, each year, YMCAs are selected to serve as conveners of teams of high-level community representatives from the public, not-for-profit, and private sectors to reduce community barriers or increase community supports for healthy living.

2004 PIONEERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES TEAMS
Bellevue, Washington
Boise, Idaho
Boulder, Colorado
Dallas, Texas
State of Delaware
Des Moines, Iowa
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Rochester, New York
Santa Clara and South San Mateo Counties, California
St. Louis, Missouri
Tampa, Florida
State of West Virginia

“...The Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative has brought diverse partners together to make communities more walkable, bikeable, and safe for individuals, kids, and families to exercise. By marrying public health advocates and community-based organizations, like the YMCA, together with city planners, transportation officials, and developers, it bolsters a community’s ability to support active living. Having visited various Pioneering Healthier Communities sites, multidisciplinary partnerships are working in communities to change policies and systems to support an active community environment that makes healthy eating and active living the easy choice.”

MARK FENTON, PUBLIC HEALTH AND TRANSPORTATION EXPERT, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF HEALTH MAGAZINE, AND AUTHOR OF “PEDOMETER WALKING”
Bellevue, Washington

COMMUNITY MISSION
Activate Bellevue, convened by the Bellevue Family YMCA and YMCA of Greater Seattle, is empowering and equipping children and their families to engage in physical activity and healthy eating that will promote family cohesiveness and wholeness of spirit, mind, and body. Surveys conducted in September 2005 indicated that about 25 percent of Bellevue’s youth are “at risk of being overweight” or are “overweight,” so Activate Bellevue’s goal is to improve the health of their youth.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the Bellevue community team decided to target children in grades K–8 who are more accessible and receptive than an older-age group. The following are highlights of Activate Bellevue’s activities:

> Provide opportunities for youth and their families to engage in physical activity.
  – In collaboration with the City of Bellevue, monthly family nights have been offered to educate youth and their families and to provide physical activity opportunities so families can exercise together.
  – In collaboration with the City of Bellevue and the Bellevue School District, an afterschool recreation program is being implemented at a high-need elementary school.
  – The team is currently developing a media and marketing strategy to inform residents of activities and events that support healthy lifestyles in the community.

> Increase physical activity in youth and ensure habits formed at school can be replicated in the home.
  – Provide tools and resources to increase physical activity.
  – Resources include nutrition and healthy lifestyle information, physical activity event listings, activity logs, and other relevant health information.
  – The Web site Action team has been collaborating with the Washington Health Foundation to establish a site as a portal for the Healthiest State in the Nation Campaign.

> Partner with community-wide events to promote physical activities for youth and families.
  – YMCA Healthy Kids Day: 350 families and youth attended. The focus was on fun physical activity options with sport demonstrations, nutrition presentations, and healthy eating options demonstrated by a local health store.
  – YMCA Just for the Fun of It Family Fun Run for all ages and abilities: 148 participants.
  – Seafair Marathon and 5K and Bellevue’s Youth Link 24-hour Relay Challenge: focus on youth, teens, and families.

TARGET POPULATION
Children in grades K – 8 and their families within the Bellevue city limits

TEAM MEMBERS
> Government/Civic Leaders: City of Bellevue and the Bellevue Public Schools
> Not-for-profit Leaders: Public Health—Seattle & King County, Overlake Hospital Medical Center, Qualis Health, Washington Health Foundation, Bellevue Family YMCA, YMCA of Greater Seattle

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
In-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Boise (Treasure Valley), Idaho

COMMUNITY MISSION
The main goal for the Activate America: Lighten Up, Idaho initiative, which is convened by the Treasure Valley Family YMCA, is to serve as the catalyst to reverse Idaho’s obesity and inactivity crisis while becoming the model for active living and healthy eating in America. Together, the team has developed guidelines to become healthy by moving more, eating better, and having fun.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the community team has taken several steps including:

> Encouraging and supporting healthy eating and exercise habits and enhancing awareness of Activate America in the community

> Working with Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center to develop comprehensive wellness programs for employers. Training sessions are being held for individuals from organizations and companies interested in implementing health and wellness plans for employees.

> In collaboration, the team and Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center are designing the activity portion of a wellness policy for Boise Public School District.

> Secured a significant role in the first Governors’ Summit on Exercise and Nutrition, which attracted 400 people from across Idaho, in an effort to further educate people about the Activate America: Lighten Up, Idaho initiative.

> Hosted three new program efforts leading to helping community members become healthier including:

> Holiday Trimmings—a free program offered at multiple locations targeted to reducing the weight gain experienced during the holiday period from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day. This includes a free YMCA membership, fitness instruction, and nutritional advice. This effort was provided to 1,500 community members.

> Teen PHIT—a program for ages 12–15 that includes free fitness instruction, nutritional counseling, and the use of the unique fitness arcade. Participants earn tokens by exercises which are then used for popular state of the art Arcade games, many of which utilize gross motor skills. Games with guns or a violent theme are not allowed.

> School Age PHIT (Personal Health Initiative Training) — same program concept as Teen PHIT but targeting the school age demographic enrolled in YMCA School Age Child Care.

> Implementing America On the Move, a free statewide, pedometer-based, Web site-hosted activity program focused on schools, employers, and medical professional groups

> America On the Move in Idaho has partnered with the Activate America partnership to encourage personal health and wellness for the community.

> 10 schools and 35 employers are participating in the program and 2,024 participants are registered thru the Web site.

> The America On the Move in Idaho Fun Run and Walk will be held to benefit school wellness programs—an estimated 1,500 participants are expected.

> Leading advocacy efforts on legislation to limit vending machine choices in schools and other public areas

> Community team members testified before the state legislature on school vending machines.

TARGET POPULATION
Children in preschool through middle school and adults ages 24–45 (i.e., parents of preschool and middle-school children) throughout the state

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: Healthwise, Blue Cross of Idaho, Regence Blue Shield of Idaho, and a senior Registered Dietician


> Not-for-profit Leaders: Idaho On the Move, Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center, West Valley Medical Center, St. Luke’s Regional Medical Center, Idaho State University-Boise Campus, Treasure Valley Family YMCA, Idaho Dairy Council, Action for Healthy Kids Idaho

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$43,500 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Boulder, Colorado

COMMUNITY MISSION
The mission of the Activate Boulder County team, which is convened by YMCA of Boulder Valley, is to make Boulder County the “best place in America to be young.” Youth in Boulder have unusually high rates of binge drinking, drug use, depression, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts. Therefore, the Activate Boulder County team decided to take a slightly different approach and focus on reducing these high-risk behaviors for youth by establishing a network of “refueling stations,” or neutral places for youth to recharge.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the Activate Boulder County team has created awareness of these unhealthy behaviors and problems and ways to combat them among youth, families, and the community, and has established healthy events and activities for youth.

The network of refueling stations consists of four major components:

> Awareness and Access. Increase awareness and accessibility of the wealth of options for youth that are available in Boulder County.

> Collaboration. Foster a culture of working together by bringing together public and private partners to develop refueling station models throughout the community.

> Inspiration. Enhance how services are delivered via recognition, quality standards, training, and excitement about the vision.

> Broader Engagement. Engage more players—the business community, schools, parents, faith groups, and youth themselves—to be part of the network.

To date the Activate Boulder County team has:

> Actively engaged more than 1000 middle-school youth and 53 community organizations and has established more than a dozen partnerships; brought together public and private partners to create a network of ten refueling stations; based programs on the 40 Developmental Assets in youth; and is creating a community Web site (http://web.dailycamera.com/ourkids) with resources, information, and referrals.

> Created the Activate Boulder County Youth Advisory Board, whose members are 14 middle school youth from 6 schools, and advise the larger Activate Boulder County team and implement projects.

> Established collaborative efforts with schools, parents, not-for-profit and youth groups to establish refueling stations in the community with a specific focus on spiritual, emotional, and mental health of middle-school youth and to provide youth with protective factors to reduce risk behaviors.

> Integrated messages and established other refueling initiatives such as:

   – Extended the message to local bus drivers so that school buses can be refueling stations and resources for children daily.

   – Photo Voice. Students voice compelling opinions about issues through photography presented to the city council and county commissioners.

TARGET POPULATION
Middle school and early high school youth ages 11–17

TEAM MEMBERS

> Business Leaders: Secondary Interactive, Sterling-Rice Group

> Government/Civic Leaders: Boulder City Chamber of Commerce, Boulder Valley School District, Boulder County Public Health, Boulder County Prevention Connection; city council members


ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$80,000 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Dallas, Texas

COMMUNITY MISSION
The Dallas Activate America team, convened by the YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas, has primarily focused its efforts on activities that promote healthy lifestyles. GET A MOVE ON, Dallas’s citywide fitness initiative that was started by the mayor but phased into the Activate America initiative, is designed to help citizens become more active and fit and to live healthier lives. The program and awareness campaign are aimed at encouraging Dallas residents to be active and to move at least 30 minutes every day.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the Dallas team, through GET A MOVE ON, is conducting the following activities:

> Implementing a pilot program and curriculum with school districts to give elementary school students pedometers and the tools to use them
> Launching an awareness campaign, including public service announcements, T-shirts, and bumper stickers, encouraging people to incorporate 30 minutes of movement into everyday life
> Encouraging local companies and organizations to develop and support their own customized corporate wellness programs
> Maintaining a Web site (www.getamoveondallas.org) that includes health and fitness information and a calendar of current events
> Supporting and cross-promoting existing events in Dallas throughout the year, including citywide runs and walks and the city’s park and recreational amenities
> Cooperating with local government bodies and school districts to encourage and influence policy decisions that promote healthy living, eating, and exercise

TARGET POPULATION
> During the 2005–2006 school year, Dallas Activate America gave more than 3,000 third graders in 30 Dallas Independent School District (DISD) elementary schools curriculum and tools to participate in the program.
> For the 2006–2007 school year, third grade classes in all 157 DISD elementary schools will participate in the program. Almost 70 languages are spoken in these schools and the student body has the following racial and ethnic composition:
  – 63 percent Hispanic
  – 30 percent African American
  – 6 percent Caucasian
  – 1 percent Asian

TEAM MEMBERS
> Government/Civic Leaders: Dallas Mayor’s Office, Dallas Independent School District, Community Council of Greater Dallas, Dallas County Community College District, Greater Dallas Asian American Chamber of Commerce, City of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department
> Not-for-profit Leaders: Children’s Medical Center Dallas, the YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas, Central Dallas Ministries

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
More than $140,000 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
State of Delaware

COMMUNITY MISSION

The Activate America Delaware team, convened by YMCA of Delaware, is a statewide initiative aimed at helping to reverse sedentary trends among youth.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the Activate America Delaware team implemented the CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) program at YMCA afterschool sites throughout the state. The Delaware team adopted this strategy following the results of a pilot study of the CATCH program that took place in afterschool enrichment programs at six elementary schools. Preliminary data showed the students’ moderate-to-vigorous physical activity levels had increased from 41 percent in December 2005 to 61 percent in January 2006.

Conducted in partnership with the Nemours Health & Prevention Services Collaborative on Health Planning and Evaluation, and funded locally by the Nemours Foundation, the CATCH program pilot study was spearheaded by the Western Family YMCA and the Brandywine YMCA with a team of YMCA fitness and child care professionals. The pilot program involved 158 children participating in the CATCH program. The full study, which will include analysis of the impact on the students’ knowledge of physical fitness and healthy lifestyle, is expected to be completed in the summer of 2006. Specifically the Delaware team has:

> Implemented CATCH in six pilot sites
  - Engaged children in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity with age-appropriate, non-competitive games that encourage meaningful movement
  - Coordinated physical activity and nutritious snacks for children, trained staff, educated families on healthful living, and offered family activities that teach nutrition education, physical activity, education, and home nutrition
  - Students’ moderate-to-vigorous physical activity levels have increased from 41 percent in December 2005 to 61 percent in January 2006 (Hesse 2006)
  - Principals and PTAs of several schools are interested in future collaborations with the YMCA of Delaware and CATCH to promote organized recess situations in their school environments

> Created a seven-month behavioral change program, At Last—Livable Wellness, that works with Moving Women Forward for the “plus” portion of CATCH to integrate family support, education, and behavioral change
  - 250 participants have graduated from the program and 50 are currently enrolled
  - Additional abbreviated component created for 2006–07 school year for preteens (ages 10–12) and teens (ages 13–16) to facilitate self-esteem, positive body image, and nutritional as well as fitness education

> Placed additional focus on attracting, serving, and retaining start-stop adults interested in improving their wellness

> Created a partnership with Children and Families First to place social workers in a full-day inner-city child care center to support emotional wellness

TARGET POPULATION

> Children 5–14 years old enrolled in YMCA afterschool care and their parents

> Adults who start making lifestyle health changes but don’t stick with it

TEAM MEMBERS

> Business Leaders: Nemours Health & Prevention Services, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Delaware

> Government/Civic Leaders: Delaware Department of Education, Delaware Department of Health and Social Services

> Not-for-profit Leaders: Produce for Better Health Foundation, YMCA of Delaware, Christiana Care’s Eugene DuPont Prevention Medicine & Rehabilitation Institute, Christiana Care Home Health Care & Community Resources

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED

More than $30,000 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Des Moines, Iowa

COMMUNITY MISSION
Faced with a high number of youth who are overweight and lack physical activity, the Des Moines Activate America team, convened by the YMCA of Greater Des Moines, knew this population had to be one of their starting points in creating a healthier community. This presented an opportunity for the Activate America team to focus on families as well. Therefore, the Des Moines team put forth its goal of reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases related to poor nutrition and lack of exercise, especially among youth.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, Activate Des Moines launched a broad-based education campaign to share the facts about chronic disease prevention; collaborated with Mercy Hospital System to establish Trim Kids, a multidisciplinary 12-week program for kids and teens between the ages of 6 and 18; and began working with the public school district to encourage healthier options for students.

Below is a closer look at the Des Moines Activate America team’s strategy.

> Creating public awareness of the problem
  – Launched an education campaign to increase awareness of the rising rates of chronic diseases and obesity in the community. Created a brochure for distribution in public schools and area pediatrician offices.

> Established Trim Kids
  – This program, a collaborative effort between the YMCA and Mercy Medical Center with the support of many of the other community partners, allows doctors to work alongside YMCA staff in prescribing healthier options for food and exercise.
  
  Trim Kids targets youth in the 95th percentile on the BMI growth charts and teaches parents and children the steps necessary for long-term healthy living through exercising healthy activity and eating habits in order to take on lifetime weight management.
  
  – Parents and kids work together with the entire family (all siblings are asked to participate) to practice ways to increase daily activity and set achievable eating and exercise goals. Children learn exercises designed for their weight levels, and the families enjoy meal plans with nutritious kid-tested recipes.

  – More than 500 individuals have completed the Trim Kids program and have shown positive results in weight loss and increased activity level. Due to its success, the program is being replicated in twelve new communities.

> Work with public schools to encourage healthier options for students
  – Due to the Des Moines team’s urging of the inclusion of fitness classes and nutrition information in public schools and to decrease the number of vending machines that sell unhealthy snacks/drinks in public schools, Des Moines Public Schools is currently reviewing their policies related to nutrition, vending machines and physical education.

  – The YMCA is piloting an aerobic fitness program in a Des Moines public school.

TARGET POPULATION
Youth and adults in central Iowa

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: Principle Financial Group, Holmes Murphy
> Government/Civic Leaders: Mayor of Des Moines, City of Des Moines, Iowa Department of Public Health, Polk County Health Department
> Not-for-profit Leaders: Des Moines University, University of Iowa Prevention Research Center, YMCA of Greater Des Moines, Mercy Medical Center, Boys & Girls Clubs

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$55,000 in funds received from Mid Iowa Health Foundation, Wellmark, Healthy Polk Initiative through Polk County, and a Harkin Wellness Grant allow us to offer the program three times per year at two metro branches.
More than 500 individuals have completed the Trim Kids program and have shown positive results in weight loss and increased activity level.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

COMMUNITY MISSION
The Milwaukee team, convened by the YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee, has concentrated its work on reducing health issues related to overweight youth and their families, particularly those from low-income areas.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the Milwaukee team has been successful in initiating several small healthy-living pilot projects including a preschool pilot, an elementary school pilot, an after-school pilot, and a pilot with Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin called NEW Kids at the Y (NEW stands for nutrition, exercise, and weight management). In addition, the community team was successful in launching Milwaukee Moves, which encourages adults to get active during their lunch hour. This effort is a collaboration between local downtown businesses, the YMCA, and OnMilwaukee.com. Participants have been provided pedometers, ongoing health tips, and suggested walking routes. Through these efforts, the Milwaukee team has been successful in engaging families, neighborhood schools, churches, and government, health care, and community organizations in finding ways to improve the overall health of children and families in the community.

Below is specific information about the four pilots launched as a result of this initiative.

> Activities aimed at children and teens
  – Preschool pilot. Focused on establishing personal healthy lifestyle goals for families, nutrition education, and structured physical activities for parents and children.
  – Elementary school pilot. The 12-week session for fourth and fifth graders focused on tracking fruit and vegetable intake and increasing physical activity, including a free YMCA family membership during the program, and encouraged awareness of healthy eating habits.
  – Afterschool pilot. Worked with kids and parents to develop healthier eating habits, increase physical activity and connectedness, and reduce “screen time” (hours spent on the computer or watching television)
  – NEW Kids at the Y. This collaboration with Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin featured one-on-one work with families of obese children to improve nutrition and physical activity and discourage tobacco use.

These four pilot programs have helped establish physical activity and healthy eating programs in 18 schools in Milwaukee.

> Creating a healthier, safer, walk-able and bike-able community
  – The Milwaukee team with other groups did a walk-able neighborhood study and discussed priority areas that need curb-outs, round-abouts, bike lanes and count down crosswalk meters. The long-term plan is to add trees and other attractions to make the community enjoyable as well as create a map outlining key sights and historical landmarks. Key partners in this effort include: Milwaukee County Transit System, Milwaukee Department of Public Works, Milwaukee Police Department, Northside YMCA, Traffic Analysis & Design, Inc., Urban Open Space Foundation, Walnut Way Conservation Corporation, Wisconsin Walks and Milwaukee DCID.

TARGET POPULATION
Youth, teens, and adults in racial and ethnic communities below the poverty line; paying special attention to the neighborhood surrounding Northside Branch, one of the most disadvantaged areas of the city, where:

> 90 percent of the population are African American
> 71 percent of households have incomes under $25,000
> Median household income is $11,979
> 60 percent of the families are led by unmarried females
> 72 percent of related children ages 5–17 are living in poverty

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: The Butler Group
> Government/Civic Leaders: The commissioner of health, City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin State Senate, Milwaukee County Supervisor’s Office, Milwaukee Public Schools
> Not-for-profit Leaders: Progressive Baptist Church, YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee, Northside Branch YMCA, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$26,000 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

COMMUNITY MISSION
The mission of Activate Pittsburgh, convened by the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh, is to promote and enhance healthy lifestyles and behaviors in the Pittsburgh community, especially in minority and low-income neighborhoods.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, Activate Pittsburgh is providing quality health and wellness programs and services for individuals of all ages and backgrounds and by instilling a positive attitude toward physical activity and a lifelong commitment to a healthy lifestyle. The following provides a summary of activities underway.

> Provide programs to increase physical activity among kids, youth, and older adults
  – The A.S.A.P. (After School with Activate Pittsburgh) program enhances the health of YMCA children in 15 Greater Pittsburgh afterschool sites
  – Provides programming two days a week with physical and educational components and coordinated with the GoodApples healthy snack program
  – Improves children’s attitudes toward physical activity, improved flexibility, muscular strength, and endurance
  – In collaboration with YouthPlaces, Activate Pittsburgh directly serves urban teenagers through TAP (Teens Activate Pittsburgh) – Aims at increasing physical activity and building health literacy – Will expand to 10 sites this summer (2006)
  – YMCA ran Activate Older/Senior Fitness Programs and Silver Sneakers, programs that promote social and physical health, for more than 1,700 older adults

> Provide healthy food and snacks to worksites and under-resourced communities through GoodApples, which provides low-cost, high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables to:
  – Several corporate wellness sites
  – 42 afterschool and TAP sites, serving 1,000 kids a day
  – Several YMCAs, which receive fresh fruit and vegetables weekly to set up markets

> Establish wellness programs at companies, schools, workplaces, faith-based organizations, and community centers
  – Corporate wellness projects bring health and wellness education to companies throughout the Pittsburgh area through on-site classes and programs on such topics as smoking cessation, stress management, and group exercise classes
  – Provide convenient activity for thousands of adults and help improve health in the workplace
  – Deliver Activate Pittsburgh programming to employees of 12 local companies

TARGET POPULATION
> Aim to make program available to all afterschool facilities through the YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh in the next one to two years, targeting approximately 3,000 students
> Racial and ethnic communities below the poverty line, youth and teens, older adults, new adult exercisers, and the start-stop population (those who cannot sustain a commitment to healthy living)
  – 1,146 served at afterschool sites
  – More than 150 served through YouthPlaces
  – Each week, 5,500 children in 42 child care sites benefit cumulatively from GoodApples
  – 60 children (30 at each of two sites) served through TAP

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: PNC Financial Services, Thieman and Ward, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Jampole Communications, GoodApples
> Not-for-profit Leaders: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Community Health Services, YMCA of Greater Pittsburgh, Roman Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, Center for Minority Health at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, YouthPlaces
> Government/Civic Leaders: Hospital Council of Western Pennsylvania

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$362,500 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Rochester, New York

COMMUNITY MISSION
The Activate America initiative in Rochester, convened by the YMCA of Greater Rochester, has a goal to increase physical activity and good nutrition in children, families, and older adults.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the Rochester team is implementing policy and program strategies. Currently, the Rochester team is working with the public school system to change the food contracts to create public school menus that offer more whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables. Rochester was selected as a National Institute of Health WE CAN! (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition) Community, which will provide activities and programs that encourage improved nutritional choices and increased physical activity in youth ages 8 to 13.

Below are highlights of the Rochester team’s additional efforts:

> Enhance the health of Rochester’s youth through the implementation of the CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) program

– CATCH is a physical activity and nutrition education program for elementary school children that provides 15-week education, physical activity, and snack components.

– CATCH has been implemented in 40 YMCA afterschool sites and 4 community sites, successfully serving more than 1,500 youth in both suburban and urban areas.

– Lessons and activities focus on helping children make healthy food choices, introducing children to tasty and healthful foods, and involving children in at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.

– CATCH includes a unique hands-on Family Cooks element, which educates youth on healthy cooking. The Family Cooks program served more than 900 children at 21 YMCA sites and 4 community locations.

– The goal is to promote physical activity and healthy food choices and prevent tobacco use in elementary school children.

> Target older adults

– Engaging more than 7,000 active older adults, the Silver Sneakers program (a national fitness program) implemented at YMCA of Greater Rochester provides educational and social outlets that give active older adults companionship and fun, such as health fairs and overnight camping trips.

> Improve the health of the YMCA family

– An internal component of Activate America involves instituting healthy policies that encourage better health habits for all YMCA staff and members, providing pedometers for YMCA employees, changing food served in business meetings and events to include only healthy foods, and stocking vending machines with healthy foods.

TARGET POPULATION

> Children 6–10 years old

> Active older adults

TEAM MEMBERS

> Business Leaders: Wegmans food markets, Preferred Care

> Government/Civic Leaders: New York State Department of Health, Rochester City Council

> Not-for-profit Leaders: United Way of Greater Rochester, Golisano Children’s Hospital at Strong Memorial, YMCA of Greater Rochester

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED

$1,354,074 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Rochester was selected as a National Institute of Health WE CAN! (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition) Community, which will provide activities and programs that encourage improved nutritional choices and increased physical activity in youth ages 8 to 13.
The team has taken steps to create an environment in which healthy living is a part of the fabric of all segments of community life.
Santa Clara and South San Mateo Counties, California

COMMUNITY MISSION
The Santa Clara and South San Mateo Counties team, convened by the YMCA of Santa Clara Valley and the YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula, is focusing on service delivery and changing the community culture around active living and healthy eating for its citizens, especially children and adults in low-income and minority neighborhoods.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the team has reached out to both public and private representatives to ask them to act as satellite sectors, willing to educate, communicate with, and activate individuals through their services around physical activity, health education, and nutritional programs.

In addition, the team has taken steps to create an environment in which healthy living is a part of the fabric of all segments of community life. For example, the team has a recognition system to designate certain organizations as Activate America sites. These sites initiate programs that naturally complement the culture of the communities in a seamless fashion and aim for a locally sustainable culture shift over time, not to mention offer fun and engaging services. More than 80 awardees will be granted such recognition. Here are some additional team highlights:

> Santa Clara County After School Collaborative (representing 170 programs) is an expert resource and catalyst for implementing physical activity, nutrition, and family education components in all afterschool programs in the county.
  – Cosponsored the Get Fit for Learning mini-conference for 108 afterschool staff to learn strategies for implementing physical activity, nutrition, and family education
  – Cosponsored Fit for Learning train-the-trainer sessions for afterschool organizations to institutionalize training into their organizations on physical activity, nutrition, and family education
  – Cosponsored a strong physical activity, nutrition, and family education track at the CalSAC Afterschool Regional Conference, which had 420 attendees

> Key sponsor of the Santa Clara Office of Education Fit for Learning initiative
  – Promotes the development of healthy school environments through resources provided to teachers

  – Encourages students to become engaged in creating healthier campuses and reinforces healthy afterschool activities
  – Aligns afterschool program curriculum with the school curriculum to support healthy lifestyles

> YMCA of Santa Clara Valley and YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula serve as role models in promoting healthy lifestyles for staff, members, and volunteers
  – Created high expectations for physical activity, nutrition, health education, and connectedness in all work with members, volunteers, and staff
  – All snacks offered during child care, afterschool, and training events align with a value for nutrition
  – SPARK curriculum implemented in all YMCA afterschool programs (62) along with a family education component and healthy lifestyle family events

TARGET POPULATION
Children and youth, as well as adults who have been unable to sustain a commitment to healthy living, especially racial and ethnic minorities and low-income groups

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: Canaan Partners, The Curious Company, Cisco Systems, Cisco Community Fellowship Program
> Government/Civic Leaders: Santa Clara County Office of Education
> Not-for-profit Leaders: Stanford Health Center, Healthy Silicon Valley: Health Trust, YMCA of Santa Clara Valley, YMCA of the Mid-Peninsula

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$50,000 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
St. Louis, Missouri

COMMUNITY MISSION
The Activate America St. Louis team, convened by the YMCA of Greater St. Louis, is already seeing the benefits and power of a communitywide partnership. The YMCA of Greater St. Louis and its team are leading the community in reaching out to older adults through walking programs.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, Active Older Adults is targeting seniors in a specific inner-city community to get them physically active by walking in their neighborhood, rather than getting into a car to go to a mall or a park. Currently the program reaches more than 200 older adults through this pilot initiative; the goal is to reach more than 10,000 older adults within the community. Here is a closer look at St. Louis’s initiative.

> Through a 12-week, low-cost program, Active Older Adults provides new learning experiences and increased opportunities weekly for socialization among participants. This program:
   – Enables older adults to maximize spiritual, physical, and mental health so that they can be productive, flourishing, and independent members of the community
   – Brings positive behavioral change to the senior population of the South City neighborhood by establishing a social, physical, and mental health outlet
   – Provides more than 200 activities per week through the program
   – Has a nationally certified personal trainer lead a beginner and intermediate/advance walking group two days per week
   – Uses fitness assessments to determine which group (beginner or intermediate/advance) walkers should be in
   – Invites guest speakers to discuss goal setting, identifying the benefits of walking, overcoming barriers to walking, proper walking attire, and various health topics such as cholesterol, diabetes, and Medicare Plan D

> Findings
   – The program is easily replicated, which will encourage seniors to be more active.
   – Seniors who participate in both swimming or other YMCA programs, and the walking program, are more closely adhering to the recommended physical activity guidelines.
   – Approximately half the initial enrollees have stayed actively involved with the program.

TARGET POPULATION
Adults ages 50 and older

TEAM MEMBERS
> Government/Civic Leaders: Saint Louis University, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis, City of St. Louis Department of Health
> Not-for-profit Leaders: Non-Profit Consortium, American Heart Association, Salem Lutheran Church, YMCA of Greater St. Louis, and Interfaith Partnership of Metropolitan St. Louis

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
In-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff
Tampa, Florida

COMMUNITY MISSION
Activate Tampa, convened by the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA, is creating a volunteer driven, grassroots initiative to enable communities and community leaders to pursue development of healthy spirit, mind, and body.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the team is identifying community leaders willing to volunteer time, talent, and treasure in pursuit of active communities; activating neighborhood groups and schools; and educating constituents on the benefits of activity, socialization, and healthy nutritional activities. The following is a snapshot of Activate Tampa’s activities:

> Launched a Neighborhood Challenge calling residents of three Seminole Heights neighborhoods (which is a four-square-mile area whose residents are 33 percent Hispanic, 33 percent African American, and 33 percent Caucasian) to increase their physical activity levels through walking programs and to log the “activity minutes” they spend doing any activity that will help make them healthier

> Local leaders train through the YMCA Fitness Certification program to volunteer as community educators

> Community Health Association Partners (CHAP) provide diabetes screening and education

> University of South Florida College of Public Health maintains a data collection database

> The Tampa Police Department assists in developing stronger WATCH programs, so that more walking programs can exist

> Established strong relationships with schools to engage faculty and students in becoming more physically active and establishing good nutrition habits

– Broward Elementary School faculty and staff had ongoing education and activity programs. Team members helped influence the wellness policy for the district and presented it to the school board.

TARGET POPULATION
Residents of Hillsborough County and East Pasco County

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: Seminole Heights Children’s Enrichment Center, Caspers Corporation (McDonald’s franchise owner)

> Government/Civic Leaders: Steps to a Healthier Florida, St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital, Hillsborough County Health Department, School District of Hillsborough County, Seminole Heights Homeowner’s Association

> Universities: The University of South Florida’s colleges of public health, education, and medicine

> Not-for-profit Leaders: American Heart Association, Community Health Partners (CHAP), and Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$62,000 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff, specifically outdoor advertising, pedometers, and fitness certifications for volunteers, as well as free diabetes screening and education provided by Community Health Association Partners (CHAP).
State of West Virginia

COMMUNITY MISSION
As a statewide initiative, the West Virginia Activate America team, convened by the YMCA of Kanawha Valley, is focusing its efforts on introducing permanent lifestyle changes in physical activity and nutrition to all West Virginians, but is putting an emphasis on youth.

TO REACH THIS GOAL, the team has implemented a youth strength-training program in every YMCA-run afterschool location, where approximately 2,000 children a day participate. These children also receive nutritional instruction. Policy initiatives have focused on health care improvements with an emphasis on prevention. Two YMCA members sit on a gubernatorial coalition that is focused on enhancing public school physical education programs and nutrition offerings. As a result, the West Virginia Department of Education deemed the YMCA Activate America program an acceptable alternative public school curriculum for those schools unable to fulfill legislative mandates on necessary minutes of physical activities.

Success has also come in collaboration for this state initiative. With a primary focus on youth, the Charleston Area Medical Center (CAMC) and Mountain State BlueCross BlueShield are offering their services to this initiative. CAMC is supplying healthy foods literature, which is based on the Stop Light Diet, and providing a nutritional awareness program that helps children and families make healthier food choices. Mountain State BlueCross BlueShield has visited 10 YMCAs across the state with their HealthPLACE on the Move, a mobile unit that provides free health screenings for children.

Other strategies and goals of this effort include:

> Fuel the local adoption of community-based strategies for healthy living among all sectors of society through a collaborative, responsive approach to the needs and strengths of the local community to create programs, policy, and the environment needed to build healthier lives

> Provide opportunities for permanent lifestyle changes and provide direction and education regarding physical activity and nutrition

– Youth strength-training program, which contains intermittent activity and resistance exercises, to be included in every YMCA-run afterschool site and run concurrently with the nine-month school year calendar. Pre- and post-move assessments will be given to reveal the amount of physical activity and sedentary time each day.

– Policy initiatives focused on health care improvements with an emphasis on prevention

TARGET POPULATION
Children 6 to 13 years old

TEAM MEMBERS
> Business Leaders: Steptoe & Johnson Law Firm, Carelink Health Plans of West Virginia


> Not-for-profit Leaders: Sisters of St. Joseph Charitable Fund, Health Sciences and Technology Academy, Beckley-Raleigh County YMCA, YMCA of Elkins, Greenbrier Valley YMCA, Harrison County YMCA, Huntington YMCA, YMCA of Kanawha Valley, Parkersburg YMCA, Tri-County YMCA, and YMCA of Wheeling

ADDITIONAL LOCAL RESOURCES SECURED
$11,250 in addition to the in-kind contributions of technical assistance and expertise from team members and their staff, specifically free health screenings across the state from Mountain State BlueCross BlueShield HealthPLACE on the Move.
Community strategies that promote cultural and environmental change are supportive of healthy lifestyles.
Acknowledgements
Pioneering Healthier Communities Expert Advisors

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is one of the 13 major operating components of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which is the principal agency in the United States government for protecting the health and safety of all Americans and for providing essential human services, especially for those people who are least able to help themselves. CDC has partnered broadly with YMCA of the USA to provide technical assistance in the development of healthy communities. As part of the partnership, there are two formal cooperative agreements: 1) a 3-year, $1.4 million per year agreement between CDC and YMCA of the USA to support the Pioneering Healthier Communities project and 2) a 4-year, $500,000 per year agreement with the Administration's Steps to a Healthier US Initiative to help increase the capacity of the Steps grantees through conferences, mini-grants, and formal partnerships with local YMCAs.

Visit the following sites for more information:
CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp

and

Steps to a HealthierUS initiative
www.healthierus.gov/steps.

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS) is an advisory committee of volunteer citizens who advise the President through the Secretary of Health and Human Services about physical activity, fitness, and sports in America. YMCA of the USA is serving as an official advocate of the President's Challenge—a program that encourages all Americans to make being active part of their everyday lives. PCPFS is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2006. Go to their Web site to find out how your community or organization can become a 50th Anniversary Partner to Get America Moving!

Visit the following sites for more information:
The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports www.fitness.gov.

Active Living by Design (ALbD) is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is a part of the UNC School of Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This program establishes innovative approaches to increase physical activity through community design, public policies and communications strategies. Active Living by Design is funding 25 community partnerships across the country to demonstrate how changing community design will impact physical activity. YMCA of the USA partnered with Active Living by Design in the development of Pioneering Healthier Communities to help spread the success of their community efforts to advance health in the built environment.

Visit the following site to learn more about ALbD, including tools that will help your communities advance healthy living:
America On the Move Foundation is dedicated to improving health and quality of life by promoting healthful eating and active living among individuals, families, communities and society. America On the Move at the YMCA is a national program that was co-created by the America On the Move Foundation and the YMCA to help YMCAs—together with community leaders—in their effort to deliver mission-based program supporting strong and healthy kids, families and communities. The America On the Move at the YMCA program guide contains tools to inspire people in your communities to engage in AOM’s fun, simple ways to become more active, eat more healthily, and achieve and maintain a healthy weight. This guide can simplify the process, as it’s easy use thanks to the powerful tools built into the AOM Web site. The AOM Web site offers a self-contained online program that does a great job of everything from registration and tracking to motivating and connecting, and offers a wealth of tools for individuals, groups and program directors.

More information can be found at www.americaonthemove.org.

The American Public Health Association (APHA) is the oldest and largest organization of public health professionals in the world, representing more than 50,000 members from over 50 occupations of public health. APHA brings together researchers, health service providers, administrators, teachers, and other health workers in a unique, multidisciplinary environment of professional exchange, study, and action. APHA and YMCA of the USA are working together to educate the public health community about the YMCA Activate America program and to engage communities, like the Pioneering Healthier Communities, in advancing APHA’s work. Visit APHA’s site for more information: www.apha.org.

National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (CDD) is a national public health association, founded in 1988 to link the chronic disease program directors of each state and U.S. territory to provide a national forum for chronic disease prevention and control efforts. Since its founding, CDD has made impressive strides in mobilizing national efforts to reduce chronic diseases and the associated risk factors by supporting state and community-based prevention strategies. CDD has been working with YMCA of the USA since 2002 in the early stages of Activate America. CDD is the lead partner with the YMCA on their Steps to a HealthierUS National Partnership. Chronic Disease Directors are expanding their work with YMCAs at the state and local level on the prevention of chronic disease and the associated risk factors. CDD provides tools and technical expertise for YMCA of the USA to share with the YMCA movement.

Visit CDD’s site for more information: www.chronicdisease.org.
The Health Research & Educational Trust's (HRET) goal is to advance ideas and practices beneficial to health care practitioners, institutions, consumers and society at large. Its principal activities focus on identifying, exploring, demonstrating and evaluating key strategic health care issues affecting innovative health care delivery systems, educating the field about the implications of changing health policies and developing strategies for community health improvement. Through its affiliation with the American Hospital Association, HRET accesses valuable resources, data and thought leadership, yet it maintains the autonomy needed to examine issues independently and objectively. HRET's independent board and partners contribute significantly to the "brain trust" established at HRET. Because they directly reflect the health care needs of their residents, community networks provide a unique and vital perspective on how health care should be delivered. Community networks tend to be more responsive to immediate and practical needs of the community. HRET is working with YMCA of the USA to deepen the collaborative efforts between YMCAs and hospitals.

Visit HRET's site for more information: www.hret.org.

The Association for Community Health Improvement (ACHI)—a program of HRET—is a national association for community health, healthy communities and community benefit. ACHI convenes and supports leaders from the health care, public health, community, and philanthropic sectors to help achieve shared community health goals, and works with hundreds of members to strengthen community health through education, peer networking, and the dissemination of practical tools. It focuses primarily on access to care, chronic disease prevention and community benefit. The Association was conceived in mid-2002 as a successor to three national community health initiatives, including the Coalition for Healthier Cities and Communities.

Visit ACHI's site for information and tools: www.communityhlth.org.
YMCA of the USA gratefully acknowledges these sponsors that have supported the Pioneering Healthier Communities initiative. Each of these organizations has contributed meaningfully to the development of the initiative, an integral component of YMCA Activate America. For their important commitment to improving the health of not only individuals and families, but also communities, YMCA of the USA thanks these generous sponsors.

In 1998, PepsiCo, parent company of Aquafina, became the first mission sponsor of YMCA of the USA, committing $16 million over 10 years. As a 2004 sponsor of Pioneering Healthier Communities, Aquafina demonstrated its commitment to the Smart Spot™ program, by encouraging and promoting healthy lifestyle habits and improving access to YMCAs and other health and wellness programs. As part of the Smart Spot program, products with the Smart Spot designation meet nutrition criteria based on authoritative statements from the National Academy of Sciences and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Currently, PepsiCo is a national sponsor of the YMCA Activate America initiative.

For more information, please visit www.smartspot.com.

Greenfield Online, Inc. is the leading independent provider of Internet-based survey solutions to the global marketing research industry. The company operates via its subsidiary, Ciao, in Europe. The Company has built and actively manages the Greenfield Online panel, one of the largest, most robust and demographically diverse marketing research panels in the world. With access to millions of survey respondents throughout the world, coupled with advanced research technologies and survey designs, Greenfield Online supplies its clients with diverse, demographically representative survey research data. Albert Angrisani, formerly with Harris Interactive, was appointed the Company’s president and chief executive officer in September, 2005. In 2005, Greenfield Online made a donation to the Pioneering Healthier Communities Project by fielding a national survey to support this initiative.

For more information or to join the panel: www.greenfield.com or www.ciao-ag.com.

The JCPenney Afterschool Fund is a charitable organization committed to providing children with high-quality afterschool programs that foster their academic, physical and social development. The Fund’s contributions to national afterschool providers give disadvantaged children access to programs that keep them safe and constructively engaged when the school day ends. The JCPenney Afterschool Fund also works to raise awareness of the benefits of afterschool programming and the world of opportunities that awaits every child after school. In addition to providing significant grants for YMCA afterschool programs, the JCPenney Afterschool Fund was an early sponsor of the Pioneering Healthier Communities Conference and the Gulick Project, both components of YMCA Activate America. Through its financial support, it has helped the YMCA impact healthy lifestyles of America’s youth during afterschool hours through engagement of school-aged kids in physical activity and nutrition/health education, and modeling of healthy choices.

For more information, please visit www.jcpenneyafterschool.org.
**Kellogg Company** became a sponsor of YMCA Pioneering Healthier Communities in 2006. With 2005 sales in excess of $10 billion, Kellogg Company is the world’s leading producer of cereal and a leading producer of convenience foods. Kellogg products are manufactured in 17 countries and marketed in more than 180 countries around the world. Kellogg has chosen to focus its philanthropic efforts on three areas: helping children and youth reach their potential, improving opportunities for minorities and women, and strengthening communities. In honor of Kellogg’s 100th Anniversary, Kellogg’s Corporate Citizenship Fund, the charitable arm of Kellogg, made a grant to YMCA Activate America to sponsor Pioneering Healthier Communities and offer support for the Gulick Project and YMCA Healthy Kids® Day.

For more information, please visit [www.kellogcompany.com](http://www.kellogcompany.com).

**Kimberly-Clark Corporation** and its well-known global brands are an indispensable part of life for people in more than 150 countries. Every day, 1.3 billion people—nearly a quarter of the world’s population—trust Kimberly-Clark brands and the solutions they provide to enhance their health, hygiene and well-being. With brands such as Kleenex, Scott, Huggies, Pull-Ups, Kotex and Depend, Kimberly-Clark holds the No. 1 or No. 2 share position in more than 80 countries. Kimberly-Clark and YMCA of the USA formed an alliance in 2001 that included support for a national positioning campaign, the YMCA of the USA Internet site, Family Super Grants to local YMCAs and more. In 2004, Kimberly-Clark extended its support to YMCA Adventure Guides, a program that fosters understanding and companionship between parent and child. In 2005, Kimberly-Clark renewed its partnership with YMCA of the USA, extending the relationship to six years and bringing total donations to nearly $12 million. Kimberly-Clark was one of the first supporters of YMCA Activate America and has generously sponsored all aspects of the initiative, including the Gulick Project, the Pioneering Healthier Communities Conference and YMCA Healthy Kids® Day.

For more information, please visit [www.kimberly-clark.com](http://www.kimberly-clark.com).

**The PepsiCo Foundation’s** mission in Health and Wellness is to advance the knowledge of how to promote healthy lifestyle behavior and effect positive behavior change with a focus on three areas: community activation, minority communities and health professionals. Also, the Foundation supports programs and organizations that encourage young people to be physically active and educates them about the value of healthy eating and a balanced diet. The PepsiCo Foundation, along with PepsiCo’s operating divisions, gives grants to more than 1,000 community organizations. YMCA of the USA’s history with PepsiCo dates back to 1998—a year when the two organizations signed a 10-year agreement. In 2005, the PepsiCo Foundation generously sponsored the Pioneering Healthier Communities Conference, part of the YMCA Activate America initiative.

For more information, please visit [www.pepsico.com](http://www.pepsico.com).
Pioneering Healthier Communities teams, which have been convened by YMCAs, are making strides to prevent the youth of today from having a lower life expectancy than their parents.