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Preventing Childhood Obesity from the Start

Childhood obesity is now widely recognized as a major public health concern. Health care providers, schools, and even some food companies are among those beginning to actively address this issue, reaching out to school-age children and their families.

Based on evidence that many children are already overweight and obese before they start school, Public Health Solutions has taken a different approach. Our early childhood obesity prevention initiative, *It's Never Too Early: Feeding Your Baby Well*, a series of multilingual education and prevention DVDs, seeks to teach parents to help children under the age of two develop healthy eating habits from the start so they can maintain a healthy weight for a lifetime and reduce their risks for developing chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

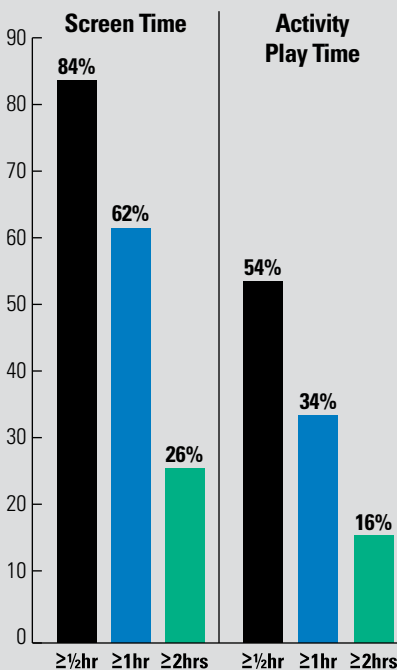
It's Never Too Early is an outgrowth of focus groups and surveys

conducted by Public Health Solutions in a number of our Neighborhood WIC centers throughout New York City. (WIC is a federally-funded supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children, serving pregnant and lactating women and their children, ages 0-5.) Each DVD contains five vignettes providing information on what to feed children from birth to age two, and is aimed at parents, grandparents and other infant caregivers. Real families appear in the DVDs, to enhance the likelihood that viewers will identify with what is being shown. To date, an English/Spanish DVD and an English/Mandarin DVD have been produced. An English/Creole/French DVD is currently in production.



Public Health Insight

Daily Screen Time and Active Play Time Among 2-4 Year-olds in WIC (n=526)



Other than race and ethnicity, the strongest predictors of overweight in our study were low level of physical activity and a large amount of screen (computer and television) time, particularly relative to active playtime.

For more information see: Nelson JA, Carpenter K, Chiasson MA. Diet, activity, and overweight among preschool-age children enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). *Prev Chronic Dis* [serial online]. 2006 Apr.

The content of the DVDs include universally relevant messages, such as the health benefits of breastfeeding and the need to curtail excess bottle feeding. Based on research and discussions with specific ethnic groups, Public Health Solutions adjusted the messages to insure cultural and linguistic appropriateness as well. For example, the role of fathers as caregivers is emphasized in the English/Spanish DVD, based on specific requests from Latina participants in focus groups. Research findings that not only grandmothers -- but also grandfathers -- play an important role in caring for Chinese-American children early in life resulted in the depiction of a grandfather participating in infant feeding in the English/Mandarin DVD. Based on expert interviews with Haitian families, the English/Creole/French DVD places more emphasis on caregiving by mothers, female relatives and "aunties."

Public Health Solutions is now conducting a rigorous study to evaluate the English/Spanish DVD. Latinas who received the DVD were selected from one WIC site as the Intervention Group; Latinas who did not receive the DVD were selected from three other WIC sites to be the Control Group. Both groups were surveyed at baseline, at three months after initial viewing of the DVD, and at six months after enrollment in the study. If the intervention is effective, the Intervention Group mothers will be more knowledgeable about and more likely to engage in healthy infant feeding practices at the time of follow-up surveys.

Developing, Implementing and Advocating Public Health Solutions



I am very pleased to share with you the first issue of our new newsletter - *Solutions*. As the masthead indicates, we intend to provide our readers with perspectives on preventing disease and improving health that we hope will be interesting to you and useful in your own endeavors. This issue of *Solutions* also recognizes a milestone we reached at the end of last year, when we celebrated our 50th anniversary. At that time, we both honored our distinguished history and set our sights on the future. We are excited to be entering a new era, which holds promise to achieve much needed advances in public health.

New name for a new era

Having been known since our founding in 1957 as Medical and Health Research Association of New York City (MHRA), we have begun this new era by changing our name to Public Health Solutions. The fact is, our organization has evolved considerably and we felt it was important to have a name that not only reflects who we are but also encompasses our plans for the future.

As a large and complex organization that has had a long history, yet a low profile, we realize that few in the public health community could say they know us well. For us to be most effective in the future, it is important that our many colleagues and constituents understand us and view us as a resource. Public Health Solutions is a nonprofit organization that develops, implements and advocates dynamic solutions to prevent disease and improve community health. We conduct comprehensive research providing insight on public health issues, create and manage com-

munity health programs, and provide services to government and other nonprofits to address public health challenges. Under the banner of our new name, we intend to communicate that more clearly.

Committed to improving public health

Programs of Public Health Solutions address critical public health needs, such as maternal and child health, nutrition, access to health insurance, HIV prevention and care, and smoking cessation. For government agencies, nonprofit organizations and others, Public Health Solutions provides services to enable them to enhance their effectiveness and strengthen their capacity to have an impact and efficiently manage funds.

Scientific research provides a foundation

Along with the new name, we are using a tagline that describes one of our unique capabilities and one important way Public Health Solutions achieves results: *Merging Research and Action*. This tagline is grounded in our heritage. MHRA was founded to enable the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and other organizations in New York City to conduct health research to inform their work. Over the years, we saw an opportunity and a need to build upon this foundation of rigorous scientific research to link research and practice in dynamic ways to improve the health of communities. Today, as Public Health Solutions, we use research wherever we can to help illuminate critical public health issues and to design, implement and assess effective methods for preventing disease and improving health in New York City and beyond.

Innovation leads to better methods

The health problems facing our communities demand the best thinking and creativity of all of us working in the field. Public Health Solutions is committed to continuous innovation. *Solutions* will provide insight about emerging issues and showcase programs that are achieving desired outcomes. We will highlight effective interventions, best practices, and results of promising pilots and demonstration projects that we hope will stimulate your own thinking about innovative approaches. We will also talk about established programs whose effectiveness has already been proven.

Although there are always many things we would like to share with you about the work we are doing at Public Health Solutions, we intend this newsletter to focus on topics of interest to our readers. I encourage you to send me an email at erautenberg@healthsolutions.org to let me know what is on your mind, so that we might address it in a future issue.

Ellen Rautenberg
President and CEO

Innovations

Home Visiting Helping First-Time Parents Succeed

Low-income, first-time parents who receive education and support services in their homes from nurses through an innovative national program called the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) have been shown to have children with better health, fewer childhood injuries and improved readiness for school. And their mothers have increased employment and fewer subsequent pregnancies. Public Health Solutions is bringing benefits like these to 300 families in North and West Queens and Far



Rockaway, through its new Nurse-Family Partnership Program. Enrolled during the prenatal period, eligible families are having their first child and are at high risk; nurses will provide in-home support with all aspects of child care, child development and parenting, from birth to the child's second birthday. Accredited by the national program, the new Public Health Solutions NFP program is a partnership with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

More Mothers Learning Baby Basics

Millions of mothers prepare for pregnancy and learn parenting skills by reading the best-selling series *What to Expect When You're Expecting*. Yet many families living in poverty cannot afford these books or do not have the language and literacy skills to understand them. That's why The What To Expect Foundation (WTEF), a nonprofit organization associated with the books, created *Baby Basics*. This prenatal health literacy program provides comprehensive information and support for families in need and their healthcare providers. The necessity of such programs is illustrated by the relatively high infant mortality rate in the U.S. (higher than that of 28 other nations), and the fact that over 50 million adults in the U.S. have limited literacy skills. Public Health Solutions recognized that this program had great potential to help the mothers it serves through its MIC-Women's Health Services centers to be better equipped to provide a healthy future for their children. In 2005, it initiated a pilot program in concert with WTEF and other partners to test the effectiveness of the program in the Jamaica MIC Center in Queens. Based on the results of the successful pilot, the *Baby Basics* program will now be expanded to all MIC-Women's Health Services centers in Brooklyn and Queens, as well as to our Bushwick Bright

Start, Nurse-Family Partnership and Neighborhood WIC programs. Public Health Solutions is the first health organization to incorporate all three *Baby Basics* components systemwide. The expanded program is funded by a grant from the New York State Health Foundation.

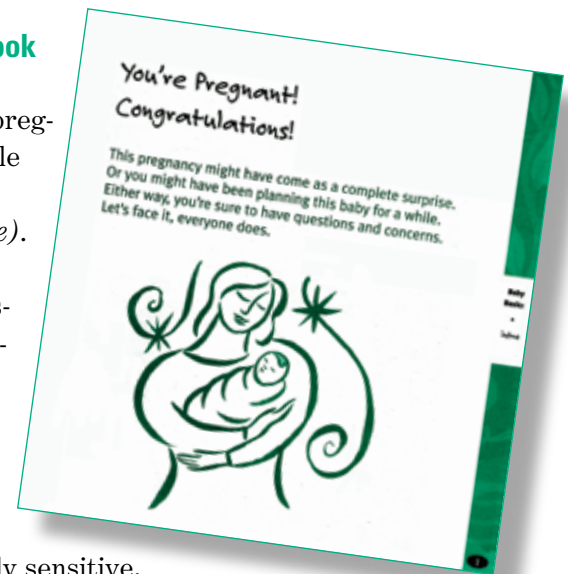


The Baby Basics Program

The Baby Basics Book and Planner:

A month-by-month pregnancy guide, available in both English and Spanish (*Holá Bébe*).

The book provides low-income mothers-to-be and their families with important health information previously unavailable in low literacy format. Content is socially and culturally sensitive, and is particularly accessible. The Planner is designed with a place for appointment times, lab values, and questions for the provider, and is pocket-sized so that the patient can easily keep it with her at all times.



Baby Basics Professional Training: Training for health providers and educators in health literacy and cultural competency.

Mom's Clubs and Curriculum: Discussion groups led by specially trained facilitators provide supportive opportunities for women to discuss their pregnancies and share their concerns and experiences with other pregnant women.

What's New: *Program Initiatives*

New Programs Underway at Public Health Solutions Designed to Reduce Risk and Improve Health among Diverse Populations

Open This Envelope and Stay Covered

Enabling Chinese immigrants to keep public health insurance when their coverage comes up for renewal is the aim of a new campaign called *Open This Envelope and Stay Covered*. Recently launched by Public Health Solutions in Flushing,

Queens, home to the largest ethnic Chinese community in the New York metropolitan area, this program will provide information and assistance to Chinese-speaking immigrants about renewing their health insurance. The program was developed in response to a recent study by the New York State Coalition of Prepaid Health Services, which showed that Chinese immigrants

who do not speak English are 12 percent more likely to lose their coverage at the time of renewal than other public insurance beneficiaries in New York. Chinese-speaking immigrants are often not aware that their insurance needs to be renewed and too frequently do not recognize or understand the official packet of renewal forms they receive in the mail. As a result, too many lose their public health insurance

coverage and become uninsured until they again complete the lengthy application process. The *Open This Envelope and Stay Covered* campaign will include a health insurance renewal hotline operated by bi-lingual program staff, and a variety of outreach and education activities. This Public Health Solutions project is funded by the New York State Health Foundation.

The Future Is Ours

Reducing the incidence of unsafe sexual behavior among young, heterosexual women living in urban communities where rates of HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases (STD's) are high is a challenge for all organizations involved in HIV prevention, including health clinics,

AIDS service organizations, and other community groups. These organizations will soon have access to a new behavioral intervention based on a proven risk reduction model called *The Future Is Ours (FIO)*. Public Health Solutions, in partnership with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the developer of FIO,

the HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies at Columbia University, are working to re-package, standardize, pilot test and evaluate this intervention, and then make it more widely available throughout the United States. The new user-friendly FIO package will enhance the capacity of local organizations serving sexually-active young women to implement and sustain

effective behavioral interventions for this vulnerable group and provide young women at risk with tools and strategies to empower them to discuss sex with their partners and be proactive in using protection to reduce their own and their partner's risk of HIV and STD infection.

Choices

Helping low-income women prevent unintended pregnancy is the basis for *Choices*, a new initiative being introduced by Public Health Solutions at all seven MIC-Women's Health Services centers. Many of the women served at the centers experience economic hardship, emotional stress, and medical

conditions that leave them with little sense of control over many aspects of their lives, including their fertility. These complexities put patients at increased risk for unintended pregnancy, further exacerbating the hardships they already face. As such, patients need to be aware of and offered a full range of birth control methods. *Choices* will allow Public

Health Solutions to expand the range of methods provided at MIC centers to include the newest technological advances in IUDs, a method with long-term effectiveness. It will also allow the centers to offer non-surgical "medication" abortion (using the drug RU486) for early unintended pregnancy. Through this new initiative, MIC staff

who counsel patients on these topics will receive additional training to assure they are able to incorporate relevant information in their conversations with patients in a way that improves patient care. Made possible with funding from an anonymous donor, costs for the *Choices* program (including contraceptive methods and "medication terminations") will be underwritten for those who are eligible.



Improving Contraceptive Method Choice

A new collaborative effort of Public Health Solutions and Emory University will employ a computer module to enhance contraceptive counseling, patient satisfaction and birth control method continuation.

The program will design and evaluate a self-administered, computer-assisted algorithm that includes questions about patient birth control preferences as well as medical, obstetrical, gynecologic, sexual and contraceptive history. Used as an

adjunct to a visit with a medical provider, the computer module will help increase the proportion of family planning clients who choose and continue with an effective contraceptive method.

Preventing Childhood Obesity from the Start

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The baseline data included findings such as the following: while most mothers (98%) knew that cow's milk was not needed in a baby's first year, relatively few (38%) knew that a baby's stomach was only the size of a baby's fist.

The first two DVDs will be distributed free-of-charge at each of the Public Health Solutions Neighborhood WIC centers and at the Charles B. Wang Community Health Centers. The program's long-term goal is to offer all new mothers living in New York City and across New York State a language- and culturally-appropriate DVD, which would be made available at WIC centers and all hospitals with obstetric facilities. Additional financial support and/or sponsorship is currently being sought for this purpose.

Serving over 45,000 women, infants and children in its Neighborhood WIC Program, Public Health Solutions is the largest provider of WIC services in New York State. Public Health Solutions hopes the efforts described in this article will counter the epidemic of poor nutrition, sedentary behavior, and obesity before it affects another generation of New Yorkers.

Funding for the program has been provided by grants from the New York State Assembly and Speaker Sheldon Silver, and by The New York Community Trust.

Public Health Solutions is a nonprofit organization that develops, implements and advocates dynamic solutions to prevent disease and improve community health. Public Health Solutions conducts comprehensive research providing insight on public health issues, creates and manages community health programs, and provides services to organizations to address public health challenges. Founded in 1957, Public Health Solutions was formerly known as Medical and Health Research Association of New York City, Inc. (MHRA).

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Solutions

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A copy of the most recent Public Health Solutions financial report filed with the State of New York may be obtained by contacting either Public Health Solutions or the Office of the Attorney General of the State of New York

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Solutions

SPRING 2008

PERSPECTIVES ON PREVENTING DISEASE AND IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH

What's New: Inside This Issue... New programs underway at Public Health Solutions are designed to reduce risk and improve health among diverse populations. This issue features four new campaigns and initiatives... **Enabling Chinese immigrants to keep public health insurance when their coverage comes up for renewal is** the aim of a new campaign called *Open This Envelope and Stay Covered*. Recently launched by Public Health Solutions in Flushing, Queens, home to the largest ethnic Chinese community in the New York metropolitan area, this program will provide information and assistance to Chinese-speaking immigrants about renewing their health insurance... **Reducing the incidence of unsafe sexual behavior among young, heterosexual women living in urban communities** where rates of HIV and other sexually-transmitted diseases (STD's) are high is the goal of a new behavioral intervention based on a proven risk reduction model called *The Future Is Ours*... **Two new Public Health Solutions programs will help improve reproductive health...** Helping low-income women prevent unintended pregnancy is the basis for *Choices*, a new initiative being introduced at all seven MIC-Women's Health Services centers. A new collaborative effort of Public Health Solutions and Emory University will employ a computer module to enhance contraceptive counseling, patient satisfaction and birth control method continuation. For more information on all of these programs, see What's New: Program Initiatives inside on page 4.