

# STATE & LOCAL

Issues at the state and community levels

## Community health workers key to Chicago asthma intervention success

**W**HEN COMMUNITY health worker Kim Artis heard about a new effort to help Chicago public housing residents living with asthma, she jumped at the chance to take part.

"I wanted to be part of something that would empower the community, educate them and eventually bring them better health," Artis said. "I have asthma, I have family members who have asthma and you're always wondering what you can do to be better. I've been able to not only empower myself, but to educate those close to me."

Artis was referring to Helping Children Breathe and Thrive in Chicago Public Housing, a partnership between Sinai Urban Health Institute and the Chicago Housing Authority that uses community health workers to reduce the effects of asthma and help residents better manage their health. The program, which ran from 2011 to 2013 with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, was offered in six Chicago public housing developments and resulted in a variety of positive health outcomes, from decreased asthma symptoms to improved housing conditions. Asthma rates among public housing residents are often higher than the general population.

The program was not the first asthma intervention for Sinai Urban Health Institute, but it was the first time it partnered with the city housing authority, said APHA member Melissa Gutierrez Kapheim, MS, who directed the asthma intervention and is an epidemiologist at the institute. At the heart of the program was not only a strong partnership with housing officials, but a commitment to recruiting community health workers who lived in housing authority communities.

Community health workers received 75 hours of training on all aspects of asthma and were randomly shadowed throughout the program. To find residents living with asthma, they worked closely with the housing authority's case management program and interacted with residents at food pantry events, back-to-school events and health fairs. Eventually, the program enrolled 73 adults and 85 children.

"Because I'm from the community, they were willing to listen to me," said Artis, who worked with about 100 of the participants, many of whom lived in the same public housing development that Artis lives in. "We always reassured people that we weren't there to judge, it was all about making them feel better."

During the intervention period, community health workers provided in-home asthma self-management education and assessed homes for environmental asthma triggers, such as pests. Workers also connected residents to health care providers and resources such as tobacco cessation. Sometimes, health workers found hazardous housing conditions that residents could not mediate on their own, such as moldy carpets. But because of the partner-

ships built with housing officials and local property managers, many such issues were resolved. Artis noted that another positive outcome of the intervention was empowering residents to work within the system to address housing problems.

Preliminary health outcomes reported in May were encouraging. According to Kapheim, the frequency of daytime asthma symptoms among children and adults in the previous two weeks declined from 4.3 to 1.5, night symptoms decreased from 3.1 to 1.5, and days that participants needed asthma rescue medication declined from 3.5 to 1.8. By the intervention's six-month mark, asthma-related emergency room visits had declined by nearly 69 percent and urgent health care use decreased by more than 68 percent.

In regard to environmental triggers, evidence of mice and dampness decreased within six months. Also, of the 23 homes reported to management with housing issues, 15 had issues resolved as of May.

"We've heard nothing but good things about the intervention," said Andrew Teitelman, MA, LSW, vice president for resident services at the Chicago Housing Authority. "As a housing authority we are very concerned about the resident population and about helping people to advance, and poor health is a major impediment to that."

To download a webinar presentation about the program, visit [www.asthmacommunitynetwork.org/webinars](http://www.asthmacommunitynetwork.org/webinars).

— Kim Krisberg



Photo courtesy Sinai Asthma Program, Sinai Health System

Community health worker Kim Artis, right, teaches a community member about asthma at a World Asthma Day health fair held at a Chicago Housing Authority development.

## Pilot health program in schools aims to reduce asthma

**S**CHOOL-BASED health centers have been shown to benefit students by helping them deal with physical and mental health issues without ever having to leave school. Now, a pilot program begun by APHA's Center for School, Health and Education wants to take school-based health even further.

The program, in two of Detroit's most impoverished schools, will address students' health disparities, with a goal of preventing students from dropping out. It will go beyond treating medical problems to include public health

prevention strategies that reduce socially related health barriers to educational success.

APHA's center collaborated with St. John Providence Health System, a provider of inpatient care and school-based health centers in southeast Michigan, to sponsor a two-year expanded school-based health center program at Central Collegiate Academy and Durfee Elementary-Middle School.

"This is a public health program with a pro-active approach," said Terri Wright, director of the Center for School, Health and Education at APHA.

The pilot program launched in May and began with an assessment of the students' needs. Next, the center will plan, implement and coordinate strategies that incorporate evidence-based programming related to their most pressing needs.

Ken Coleman, director of school-based health centers for the health system, said the schools were chosen because they are located in a low-income neighborhood and they have historically had low graduation rates.

Central Collegiate Academy and Durfee Elementary-Middle School — which together have more than 750 students — are adjacent to each other, allowing the school-based

"School-based care is one powerful solution and this project lets us maximize its full potential."

— Steven McGee