

WISEWOMAN Program Spotlight

Southeast Alaska Women Are Changing Their Lives



COMMUNITY-CLINICAL LINKS



Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) WISEWOMAN is a tribal health consortium of 18 Alaska Native communities, providing services to both Alaska Native and non-Alaska Native women. Working to improve the health of women through WISEWOMAN requires confronting unique challenges, including extreme climate and geographical isolation with a less developed health care infrastructure. SEARHC WISEWOMAN provides services in nine primary locations throughout southeast Alaska and reaches other sites through a mobile mammography screening service.

Opportunity

On average, one woman dies from heart disease or stroke in Alaska each day. Nearly 25% of SEARHC WISEWOMAN participants are overweight, and almost half are obese. Thirty-four percent of participants have high blood pressure. SEARHC WISEWOMAN is committed to raising awareness of the risks for heart disease and stroke by helping women learn their blood pressure and cholesterol numbers and take action to achieve a healthier lifestyle.

Solution

SEARHC WISEWOMAN offers an annual well-woman exam to evaluate overall health. During the exam, participants' health goals and willingness to make lifestyle changes to achieve success are assessed. Once a woman is prepared to change her lifestyle, SEARHC WISEWOMAN can begin health coaching to support her through the process. This support system is especially important for women who live in isolated areas and may need more mentoring and motivation to implement small changes to meet their health goals.

Results

SEARHC WISEWOMAN views the program's success one woman at a time. One such success is J.I., a 57-year-old woman who lives on Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska. She is uninsured and hadn't had a physical exam in many years. After working with the program, J.I. was able to get an overall assessment of her health. Her cholesterol values were the highest the program had ever seen, and

between that and a family history of heart disease and stroke, J.I. decided it was time to make a healthy change. Through health coaching, J.I. was immediately able to focus on nutrition to control her weight and that of her family. Her first steps were to include more fruits and vegetables in her meals each day and to reduce saturated fats and sweets. After 6 months, J.I. had lost nearly 30 pounds and lowered her cholesterol, and her body mass index (BMI) had dropped from the overweight range to the normal range.

Sustaining Success

J.I.'s success is being repeated throughout the program with an increasing number of women. Alaska Native local foods and culture are incorporated into the SEARHC WISEWOMAN program's personalized approach for high-risk women. The program emphasizes small steps, such as making simple nutrition changes, reducing portion sizes, and finding activities that the participant enjoys and will do on most days of the week. Regional and cultural foods are also incorporated into the individualized approach to ensure continued success.

"If this program didn't offer the test for cholesterol, I would never have known mine was high. Being screened with little to no cost and making the medical care affordable has made a big difference in coming in for the appointments. The WISEWOMAN program really made a difference in my life."

—J.I., SEARHC WISEWOMAN participant

Additional Information

For more information about SEARHC WISEWOMAN, visit <http://www.searhc.org>.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention

