To your good health

Wouldn’t it be better to wish that people “stay well” rather than “get well”? While the debate of the issues facing the U.S. health care system today challenges us, some of the most promising solutions focus on providing preventive education, outreach, and research—all highly effective aspects of land-grant institutions, including Washington State University.

WSU Extension has, for generations, provided the information and education necessary for healthy living. Today, that outreach is locally relevant, targeted, strategic, and effective. It includes a spectrum of programs that range from engaging school-aged children in making healthy choices and mobilizing communities to promote physical activity, to helping low-income families make the most of their limited and decreasing food dollars. WSU Extension educators are helping to keep teens active and fit, to strengthen families, to prevent and manage diabetes, and to build strong rural health care systems.

The programs featured in this flyer are just a sample of the health-oriented programming WSU Extension offers in partnership with community organizations as well as with local, state, and federal governments. We consider our role in health programming critical to our mission of engaging people, organizations, and communities to advance economic well-being and quality of life by connecting them to the knowledge base of the university.

Linda Kirk Fox
Associate Director, WSU Extension

Living Well with Diabetes

WSU Extension’s Diabetes Awareness and Education program began in 2001 and currently enrolls about 250 people with diabetes, in four Washington sites. This program teaches lifestyle and self-management techniques for living with diabetes, and encourages participants to seek regular and appropriate care. The program promotes early detection and treatment to prevent or reduce the severity of complications, and works with national, state, and community partners to promote diabetes awareness and education.

Written surveys and screening of A1c average blood sugar levels and blood pressure before, and three months after, the six-week program document significant improvements in participants’ confidence to self-manage the disease and to lower blood pressure. The average A1c of enrollees is near the target of 7.0 or less.

As a result of this program, Extension has partnered with faculty at WSU Spokane and in the colleges of Pharmacy and Nursing to establish a WSU Diabetes Initiative that has sponsored semi-annual Diabetes Forums since 2005. The forum brings together researchers from across the university to discuss their research related to diabetes and to develop interdisciplinary research proposals.

More information about Diabetes Awareness is available at http://nutrition.wsu.edu/diabetes/.
Strengthening Families Means Strengthening Well-being

Strong families contribute to healthier children—it’s a fact that’s been proven time and again. The WSU Strengthening Families Program, led by faculty members in the Department of Human Development and WSU Extension, works with parents and children throughout the state and region to improve communication and other skills that promote healthy family functioning.

Since 1999, members of the WSU Extension Parenting Team have shared the Strengthening Families curriculum—which is primarily a substance abuse prevention program—with more than 650 facilitators from 39 counties in Washington and Oregon and have collected program evaluation data from 228 programs and more than 4,500 parents and 10- to 14-year-old youth. In 2004, the team incorporated a Spanish-language version of the program, and three years later extended their dissemination efforts into several tribal communities. The program operates in both rural and urban communities and often partners with schools to reach out to local families.

The results are remarkable. Children involved in the program are more likely to stay away from alcohol and drugs and to make better choices. Parents report less conflict at home and feel closer to their kids.

The program also has become the focus of scholarly work focused on evaluating the cost effectiveness of substance use programs. That research, being conducted in conjunction with the WSU School of Economic Sciences, is supported with a two-year, $400,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health.


Food Sense promotes nutritional awareness, fitness, shopping savvy

WSU Extension Food Sense is a nutrition education program employing more than 200 educators to work with over 100,000 low-income citizens across the state annually. Participants learn skills and behaviors to improve their lifestyles through nutrition, physical activity, and stretching food dollars.

Over half of the enrollees are public school students, almost one half are from diverse racial-ethnic groups, and approximately one quarter self-identify as Latino. Bilingual educators are available to deliver programs in Spanish or Russian.

Studies on the cost effectiveness of nutrition programs show that every dollar invested in education yields up to $10 in reduced health care costs.

Food Sense is supported by two funding streams. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) is funded under the federal Farm Bill and targets low-income families with young children. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service, through a $6.2 million contract with Washington State’s Department of Social and Health Services, supports a competitively funded program called Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Nutrition Education (SNAP-Ed), which targets food stamp-eligible families. Over 420 partners in state and county government and local agencies commit time and services to support SNAP-Ed, which reaches 150,000 Washington residents in a year.

In addition to community partners, Food Sense has involved other WSU departments, including the College of Business and the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center, as well as faculty from education, human development, and nutritional science.
WSU Extension’s Teen Eating and Activity Mentoring in Schools, or TEAMS, project is an integrated research–extension project that has long-term goals of improving the health of middle school students and preventing obesity during adolescence. In partnership with Spokane Public Schools, the project is designed to evaluate the impact of multi-level interventions on the individual, family, and school environment for enhancing and sustaining improvements in student health.

Individually, students are guided, through motivational interviewing, to set goals and to participate in school-based fitness programs. Specific family activities and a newsletter are designed to increase family participation and support for improved adolescent health. The school environment has been altered by increases in the healthy options in lunch menus and by removal of vending machines. The project evaluates three levels of intervention and measures the effect of single versus combined interventions.

TEAMS includes WSU Extension, multi-disciplinary faculty (Human Development, Psychology, Nursing, Nutrition and Exercise Physiology, Extension), and community public schools, and is funded by a three-year, $1.3 million USDA National Research Initiative Integrated Project grant. Currently, data from the project is being analyzed and several journal articles are in development or have already been published.

More information about TEAMS is available by contacting Ruth Bindler at bindler@wsu.edu or Kenn Daratha at kdaratha@wsu.edu.

WSU Extension 4-H promotes healthy living in new national mandate

Good health has long been a focus of the 4-H Youth Development Program. From 1922 to 1946, young people all over the country participated in the “Healthiest Boy and Girl Contest in the U.S.” Today, healthy living has been elevated to one of just three mission mandates for the National 4-H Council, and WSU Extension 4-H is an active participant.

The national 4-H Healthy Living Mission Mandate provides the framework—curricula, training programs, and evaluation tools—for promoting both physical and social/emotional well-being among youth. Specifically, the goal is that by 2014, 4-H will “expand participation to 2.75 million youth and their families in a dynamic process of healthy living opportunities, so they are physically, socially, and emotionally prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.”

Nationally and locally, the program focuses on using the 4-H youth development principles of belonging, independence, mastery, and generosity as a venue for learning about healthy living. It also creates opportunities for young people to partner with adults to improve healthy living practices and to deliver healthy living programs to a diverse population of youth in rural, suburban, and urban communities, including the inner city. 4-H healthy living programs and curricula are based on “best practices” within healthy living research.

In Washington, WSU Extension’s 4-H Youth Development Program is offering a variety of health-related programs. For example, 4-H members in Clark County developed and care for a community garden; they donate the produce they grow to the local food bank. Another 4-H program, “Media Smarts,” helps teens better understand media messages about food products and about their own personal body image.

WSU Extension 4-H also is in the process of submitting special funding initiatives to strengthen Washington’s capacity to support young people and their families in making healthy choices.
Area Health Education Center Supports Underserved, At-Risk

Washington State University Extension’s Area Health Education Center of Eastern Washington works with university and community allies to promote health for underserved and at-risk populations. It is part of a network of AHEC organizations throughout the United States that focuses on health professions education and training as well as the recruitment and retention of health care providers.

A primary focus of AHEC in eastern Washington is research and evaluation for area health and wellness programs. AHEC faculty and staff conduct research to foster long-term success in early learning and K–12 education; to evaluate mental and behavioral programs; and to build understanding of the lasting effects of traumatic childhood experiences.

For more than 10 years, AHEC has worked to understand the cumulative effects of both family and community violence on the developmental capacity and success of children, including the neurobiological effects of complex trauma. AHEC and its grant partners are front-runners in the complex trauma area, securing funding for research and evaluation from state and federal agencies. AHEC is committed to equipping people in universal systems with awareness of complex trauma as a major health issue and with the skills to proactively respond.

AHEC also is actively involved in helping area communities develop their capacities to provide health services to their residents—especially those who are underserved and/or at risk. Specifically, AHEC works to build strong rural health systems, recruit and retain quality health care providers, and partner with community leaders and stakeholders to improve existing programs, especially those addressing issues surrounding at-risk youth and K–12 capacity building.

Another key mission of AHEC is to enhance the professional education opportunities for health care providers. The center engages the health care providers of tomorrow by providing hands-on experiences for students in rural and underserved areas and offers continuing education for health care providers and educators. AHEC also trains health and education providers how to deal with childhood trauma and behavioral health challenges.

More information about AHEC is available at www.ahec.spokane.wsu.edu.