

Partners in Wellness (PIW)

Purpose: To improve the nutrition and lifestyle of food-stamp eligible or recipient older adults in North Carolina by identifying nutritional risks and intervening with nutrition education.

What is Partners in Wellness?

PIW is a nutrition education program targeted to food-stamp eligible older adults and was funded by a USDA contract (1998-2004). It is delivered at congregate nutrition sites (CNSs) throughout North Carolina prior to the hot meal that is provided by each site. PIW is based on the Socio-ecological Model which uses the individual's surrounding environment to achieve behavior change. Each level in the model (individual, interpersonal, organizational, communal and societal) is addressed in PIW delivery.

The program consists of 14 modules that are composed of 4-5 sessions, which are delivered once a week. Each 30-45 minute session involves group interaction, skill building, taste testing, and a variety of activities designed to influence behavior change. Additionally, nine 'songs that teach nutrition' (nutrition lyrics put to old tunes) were developed as an educational component of the modules. Each song was used in the appropriate module to assist with knowledge and behavior change.

How is PIW Delivered?

The program is delivered by NC Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Science Agents along with help from part time program assistants (WAs). The Agents and WAs develop and purchase materials to support the modules they deliver at each CNS. The PIW web site and program cd are available for downloading educational materials, curriculum, and interactives for use with CNS participants and for marketing. Between modules, WAs utilize educational games, educational songs, and other educational materials at the sites to extend the module objectives.

Why is PIW Needed?

- **Older adults are North Carolina's fastest growing population segment.**
 - 16% of the State's total population (1,341,371) is age 60 and older.
- **Older adults are particularly subject to the ill effects of malnutrition**
 - 80% of adults 65 and over suffer from chronic diseases and conditions, many of which are associated with malnutrition.
 - Poverty and limited incomes contribute significantly to malnutrition in older adults. As the cost of health care, medications and utilities increases, many people cut back on their food budget to pay for other necessities.



PIW Makes a Significant Impact on the Eating Habits of Older Adults at Risk for Malnutrition

For example, in FY03, Partners in Wellness provided nutrition education to 2,237 food-stamp eligible male and female older adults, 60 years old and older, at total of 81 congregate nutrition sites (CNSs) in 51 counties in North Carolina.

- Approximately 97% of PIW participants were food stamp eligible, with 21% earning less than \$550 per month.
- Our enrollment survey showed that two-thirds of participants were at moderate or high risk of malnutrition.
- On average 85% of our participants made at least two behavior changes from pre/post surveys to lower their risk of malnutrition.
- An example of success: In Lenior County, after hurricane Isabel blew through North Carolina in September 2003, participants were asked how prepared they were for a disaster type situation. Over 95% of participants responded that they were well prepared with their disaster kits supplied and ready to be used because of the training that they received during Module 12, 'When All Else Fails'.

PIW IS A Collaborative Project Among:

- The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service (at North Carolina State University [NCSU] and in 51 counties)
- North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Divisions of Aging, Public Health, Dental Health, and Social Services.
- North Carolina Institute for Health, Science, and Society
- The Departments of Family and Consumer Science, Psychology, Animal Science, and Political Science at NCSU
- Department of Nutrition at UNC-Greensboro

North Carolina Is a National Leader in Educating Older Adults

Partners in Wellness has been shared with other universities and colleges including Georgia State University, Michigan State University, Penn State University, Kansas State University, Ohio State University, Colorado State University, St. Louis University, and Meredith College.

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