

FOUR YEARS LATER, STEP-BY-STEP, WE'RE HEALTHIER!

Steps to a HealthierNY in Rockland County

Rockland County, NY — Over the past four years, the face of chronic disease prevention in Rockland County has changed — for the better. Targeting three major chronic diseases—diabetes, obesity, and asthma and their underlying risk factors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use and exposure, Steps to a HealthierNY (Steps) is improving the lives of people throughout the county.

Most important is that Steps is a “grassroots” initiative. It is stimulated and encouraged through enthusiastic local communities, groups, and organizations. Partners include municipalities, village mayors, worksites, restaurants, community agencies, school districts and individual schools, medical facilities, and more. Throughout Rockland, there is a “movement” toward recognizing the importance of a healthier community – and by being “everywhere in the neighborhood” it has affected every age group, every ethnic group, at every socio-economic level.

This federal initiative has awarded more than \$100 million to 40 communities (cities, states, and tribal entities) and **Rockland County** was one such community (NYS was funded directly and allocated funds to Rockland). The funds are to be used to work with community partners to promote better health and encourage residents to engage in behaviors leading to longer and healthier lives. As part of the nationwide Steps to a HealthierUS program, the Rockland County Department of Health (DOH), and its vast range of partnerships have been able to positively affect the health of many families.

The need for such a program in Rockland County is clear. When Steps began:

- Almost 60% of adults and 25% of adolescents were overweight.
- Over 7% of the population was diagnosed with diabetes, many more have it and don't know it[PC1].
- 22% of adolescents said they had been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their life.
- Consumption of fruits and vegetables and regular physical activity in Rockland County were **well below** recommended levels.

Each community was given the responsibility to determine how to best achieve better health outcomes in their community. To that end, the Rockland project has initiated nine comprehensive interventions in the following areas: Asthma; Corner Stores; Diabetes; Schools; Tobacco; Weight Loss; Worksite Wellness; Restaurants; and Walking. Each program, with its dedicated team of community agencies and partners, reached out to the community creating a presence that precipitated the slogan “*We Are Everywhere In Your Neighborhood*”. These programs have achieved exciting results over the past four years:

- 13 Municipalities have designated nearly 90 outdoor play areas as tobacco-free zones.
- Nearly 10,000 residents are enrolled in an ongoing countywide walking challenge.
- 80 restaurants are promoting over 950 healthier menu options.
- 51 corner stores and bodegas now stock and label over 400 healthier choices for their customers affecting over 100,000 residents living within walking distance of the store.
- More than 380 people have lost over 1,700 pounds through the weight loss programs.
- 62 teenagers have participated in programs to improve their nutrition, and lost a total of 280 pounds.
- 57 businesses and organizations have committed to providing healthier food and exercise breaks at their meetings and activities affecting over 8,800 people.
- Over 100 high-risk children and their families have participated in the Steps to Better Breathing program to reduce asthma attacks, which cost missed days at school, hospitalization, and lives.

- The General Medical Clinic at the Rockland County Department of Health has established an electronic diabetes registry and made workflow changes potentially impacting 1700 patients. So far 100 patients with diabetes have been entered into the registry system.
- Over 50 school-based teams have implemented over 200 changes in school policies that support healthier eating, exercise, and health education for students.
- 139 teachers in all nine school districts in Rockland County have been trained to use physical activity in their lesson plans to support healthy brain development and student achievement.
- Over **10,000** students are benefiting from school-based health improvements.

Great numbers, great strides - and the results after four years: a healthier community.

For more information call the Rockland County DOH at 845-364-2500
or visit the STEPS website at www.rocklandsteps.org