

Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Price County during fiscal year 2008

Overview of the Price County Nutrition Education Program

The Price County Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) was initiated in the spring of 1994. The overall goal for the program is to provide research-based nutrition education across the lifespan. Our program consists of one-time educational opportunities, walk-by displays, multi-session education, and in-depth individual education.

Price County NEP staff has had the opportunity to work as part of community health coalitions that seek to provide consistent nutritional messages that are both timely and practical. We continue to articulate the needs of food stamp-eligible individuals within our communities. We are uniquely positioned to tailor our educational services to meet the needs of limited resource individuals.

Characteristics of the low income residents in Price County

In 2001, the population of Price County was estimated to be 15,822 people, which placed it 63rd of the state of Wisconsin's 72 counties in terms of total population. In contrast, Price County is the fifth largest land mass. Indeed, only four other counties in Wisconsin have a lower population density than Price County. The population is distributed throughout rural portions of the county. This geographic isolation has a significant impact on both the health and food security of our population. One in four residents live below 185% of poverty, with 8.9% being at or below the poverty line. Food-stamp recipients face several obstacles when traveling to distant grocery stores and medical care facilities. Price County has been designated as both a dental and health care provider shortage area. In addition, 7.5% of the population does not own a vehicle and no public transportation is available. A larger number have some form of transportation that is unreliable at best.

Approximately 18.8% of Price County residents are ages 65 and older, which is significantly higher than the state average of 13.1%. The poverty rate for elderly in Price County is ranked 12th of the 72 counties at 10.6% of the population. Elderly residents of Price County attend the congregate meals or receive home delivered meals at an average of 6,774 per 10,000 seniors, which ranks in the top 1/3 of the state.

Price County has the third highest percentage of elderly individuals receiving food stamps in Wisconsin. In addition, it ranks in the top one-third of the percentage of children on food stamps as well as the percentage of the population below 185% of poverty.

Food choices are limited by the individual's ability to access one of the few grocery stores in the county. Often those in the most rural parts of the county rely on higher-priced convenience store foods because they are readily available. Fresh produce is not an option for many of these individuals. Furthermore, the system of food pantries is difficult to navigate for some residents because of the distance they must travel, the inconsistent hours of operation, and the reliance on "word of mouth" advertising. Often one must know whom to contact to access these food resources.

Research indicated that certain circumstances put households at greater risk for food insecurity and hunger. Households with a disabled individual are more likely to be food insecure. In Price County, nearly one in five residents over five has a disability. In Wisconsin, 41% of Food Share assistance groups contain at least one individual that is blind, disabled, or elderly.

Nutrition and nutrition education needs of Food Stamp Program recipients and other low-income residents of Price County

According to research done by northern Wisconsin Public Health Departments, the most pressing public health need in the north is to decrease obesity. Many area families experience health problems associated with rural poverty, including inadequate health care, poor physical and mental health, inadequate transportation and lack of recreational opportunities that involve physical activity. Deaths in our area due to heart disease (172.8 per 100,000) and stroke (79.5 per 100,000) are alarmingly higher than the state averages of 160.8 per 100,000 and 62.3 per 100,000, respectively. Due to these factors, Price County, along with four other northern counties, was awarded funds through the Blue Cross/Blue Shield grant to address the obesity issue.

Only 13 percent of northwest Wisconsin residents report that they eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Research shows, eating five fruits and vegetables per day can reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Increasing this number may influence the high rates of heart disease and stroke in Price County.

To further prove the case that residents in our area suffer from poor eating habits and physical inactivity, are the statistics compiled by the American Diabetes Association. The 2000 *Burden of Diabetes* document estimates that 11 percent of the populations in our area have diabetes compared to an average 8 percent for the state of Wisconsin.

Illness resulting from food borne disease has become one of the most widespread public health problems in the world today. An estimated 76 million people in the United States are sickened each year due to a food borne illness. Of those sickened, 325,000 are hospitalized and 5,000 people die. A large percentage of these illnesses result from improper food handling practices in the home. Seniors and those with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to food borne illness. While providing lessons through home visits, educators observed frequent food safety violations, reinforcing the need for education of food safety topics.

Educational Projects Planned for FY08

WIC: Attended walk-by lessons for participants at three WIC clinic locations in the county monthly.

After School: WNEP Educators will provide interactive lessons on nutrition/My Pyramid and physical activity lessons to youth, ages 5-11 who gather at "After-School Programs" and Summer Library Programs.

Food Pantries: Learn-While-You-Wait lessons will be taught to clients of the Lord's Cupboard Food Pantry approximately once per month.

Preschoolers: Nutrition and hand washing lessons to youth, age 4-5 who attend Head Start and Head Start Home-Based participants who attend scheduled “Socializations”.

In-School: Health Department Nurses distribute WNEP marketing materials to potential clients at elementary school visits, health check visits, kindergarten screening, etc.; youth 6-11 years.

Disabled: In-home education on food preparation, food safety, and nutrition to adults (w/o children).

Senior Dining: Lessons on nutrition and food safety topics for senior adults at five senior meal sites ten times each per year.

Adult Groups: Food Safety and nutrition topics education will be offered at income-eligible senior housing site in Park Falls. Hands-on food preservation lessons to seniors or adults at libraries where low-income audiences gather.

Home Visits: In-home education on food preparation, food safety, stretching food dollars, and nutrition lessons to adults (without children) or parents of infants/children.

Parents: Hands-on food preservation lessons to parents of infants/children at libraries where low-income audiences gather; monthly newsletter distribution to WIC sites, Head Starts, laundromats, senior meal sites, thrift shops, and food pantries. Educators will teach stretching food \$\$, nutrition, and food safety topics to Head Start Home-Based parents at their Socializations.

Other: Educators participate in the Price County Community Health Plan Coalition efforts to raise awareness and participate in activities to promote healthy eating and physical activity in the communities in Price County. Educators will teach learn-while-you-wait sessions at NTC/Job Center; geared to low-income CNA students who gather for classes there.

Gardens: Learn-While-You-Wait lessons will be offered at local farmer’s markets to WIC clients and seniors who are provided vouchers for use at these farmer’s markets.