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Valley citizens tackle health challenges

The San Joaquin Valley faces some of the worst health conditions in the state, but a group of community leaders is committed to finding solutions.

Under the auspices of the Central Valley Health Policy Institute's Leadership Program, 30 people from the local government, advocacy groups, public health, education, business, and the media have collaborated since spring 2005 to advance regional health and health care policies.

This one-of-a-kind leadership program offered through California State University, Fresno gives participants an opportunity to increase their skills and knowledge.

While participants continue to apply these skills in their workplace, the leadership program is searching for new candidates to follow their footsteps. Classes for the second cohort will begin May 12.

Many of the first group's projects/program analyses are focused on topics relating to health disparities, meeting the needs of the uninsured, improving the supply of health professionals and addressing environmental concerns.

A group composed of Robin Wood, Drs. Felicia Greer and Adrianna Padilla and Lisa Bessard is conducting a program assessment on diabetes resources in Fresno County. Members are exploring resources available to children and adolescents who struggle with overweight and obesity.

Padilla, associate clinical professor and director of medical student programs at the University of California, San Francisco-Fresno, admits that she has a difficult time referring diabetes patients for nutrition and physical activity services due to the lack of resources.

"The support system in this region needs improvement," explained Wood, a senior health educator for Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in Fresno.

Greer, an assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology at Fresno State, reports that when families seek help in becoming more active or losing weight to help manage diabetes, there are few resources that they can access. The leadership program helps identify gaps in existing health and health care programs/policy.

"The Health Policy Leadership Program brings together a variety of stakeholders committed to health care in the Central Valley. This networking is one of the top benefits of participating in this program. The partnerships that will be created will only serve as a catalyst of how we need to work in teams to better our health and social condition. [Our] hope is to address the disconnect between community organizations, health venues, and health care providers regarding knowledge and understanding of educational opportunities to assist with the challenging connection to overweight and obesity," said Padilla.

Dr. John Capitman, executive director of the Central Valley Health Policy Institute directs the leadership program. "Emerging leaders, like this group working on access to support services for people with diabetes, have so much to give to the community in terms of finding solutions to the health challenges we face," he

explained. "We have an opportunity in the Valley to come up with new tools to improve healthcare providers' efforts for their patients while finding new ways to prevent health problems."

For more information about the program, please contact 559.228.2150.

(By Brandie Campbell of the Central California Center for Health and Human Services.)

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