PLANET MassCONECT

PLANET MassCONECT is a project that focuses on building capacity in Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to find, adapt, and implement evidence-based programs (EBPs). The impetus for the project stemmed from the widely acknowledged gap between scientific discovery and delivery which led the National Cancer Institute to develop the Cancer Control PLANET, a portal that provides information on evidence-based interventions and practices in cancer control and other cancer-related data. This portal was adopted and integrated with another research project, MassCONECT (Massachusetts Community Networks to Eliminate Cancer Disparities through Education, Research, and Training), a community network funded by NCI to address cancer disparities in three Massachusetts cities (Boston, Lawrence, and Worcester). This resulted in a project titled PLANET MassCONECT developed through community-based participatory research (CBPR) principles.

The project started in 2008 and has been in continuous existence since then.

Initial iterations have been developed based on extensive needs assessments, including organizational surveys, focus groups with CBO staff, and interviews with key stakeholders to understand challenges and facilitators to adopting EBPs in practice.

The intervention includes several components:

- A two-day workshop to train CBOs in adopting Evidence-Based Interventions.
- A toolkit including training manuals, handouts, case studies, and a website tailored for local organizations
- Networking events to build a community of practitioners and provide additional training support
- Pilot grants—close to 225 CBO staff members in five Massachusetts communities were trained, and participants were provided with $90,000 in mini-grants

In line with CBPR principles, the project has always sought guidance from a Community Project Advisory Committee (C-PAC) that included representatives from the communities where the project is operating. At one point or other, it included representatives from: Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston Alliance for Community Health, Boston Public Health Commission, the City of Lawrence Community Development Department, Great Brook Valley Health Center (now known as the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center), Harvard School of Public Health, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and the YWCA of Greater Lawrence.

Products from the original PLANET MassCONECT include dissemination briefs for community partners, presentations at academic and community conferences and meetings, and scientific publications.

The current version of the PLANET MassCONECT is offered by the Outreach Core of the U54 Partnership between the University of Massachusetts, Boston (UMass Boston) and the Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center (DF/HCC), which is funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

The Outreach Core uses a community-engaged approach and is led by faculty and staff from UMass Boston and DF/HCC, in collaboration with a Community Advisory Board. This board includes representatives from:

- Boston Alliance for Community Health
- Greater Love Tabernacle

- The Brazilian Worker Center
- The City of Lawrence Mayor's Health Task Force

In this latest version, the focus of the project continues to be to build capacity in Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) for using evidence-based programs and strategies for health promotion. Goals of the Outreach Core are to:

- Support connections among researchers and community members, CBOs, FBOs, and UMass Boston students
- Provide training and technical support to help CBOs and FBOs to deliver evidence-based prevention programs and activities. This builds off of the work of the original PLANET MassCONECT project, which was led by the Viswanath Lab at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and community partners
- Train under-represented minority students from UMass Boston in outreach and community-engaged research
- Help place student trainees/interns in CBOs and FBOs
- Make research results accessible to community partners
- Participate in NCI National Outreach Network activities

An Online Portal for Evidence-based Health Program Planning

The Planet MassCONECT website is a free online database that provides resources to help individuals find, choose, and adapt evidence-based health programs that meet their needs. We provide a 6-step process to walk individuals through identifying useful data for health program planning. Our Resource Finder allows users to search for both local and national-level data on several health topics, and we continually add new health topics to provide a larger breadth of resources. Visitors to the Planet MassCONECT site can use the site in a variety of ways to find useful resources and information. For those wanting to learn more about our stepped approach to Evidence-Based Program (EBP) planning, our website walks through each of the six steps and provides useful resources within each step to help users find an EBP that works for their needs. For individuals looking for specific data, whether locally or for a specific health topic, our Resource Finder enables users to tailor their search to provide resources that meet their specific needs. Finally, our website also includes useful information on local funding opportunities, research findings, events, and more for visitors to take advantage of.

PUBLICATIONS

Ramanadhan, S. & Viswanath, K. (2018). Engaging Communities to Improve Health: Models, Evidence, and the Participatory Knowledge Translation (PaKT) Framework. In E. B. Fisher, L. Cameron, A. J. Christensen, U. Ehlert, Y. Guo, B. F. Oldenburg, & F. Snoek (Eds.), Principles and Concepts of Behavioral Medicine: A Global Handbook (pp. 679-712): Springer Science & Business Media.

Ramanadhan, S., Minsky, S., Martinez-Dominguez, V., & Viswanath, K. (2017). Building practitioner networks to support dissemination and implementation of evidence-based programs in community settings. Translational Behavioral Medicine, 7(3), 532–541. PMCID: PMC5645279