

The Bronx Health-Smart Church Program

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Funded by PepsiCo

The Bronx Health-Smart Church Program was implemented at four churches in Bronx, NY, and is the church-based version of the Health-Smart Behavior Program. Two African American/Black churches and two Hispanic/Latino churches were recruited to participate in this project. Of the four churches, two served as an intervention group and two served as a wait-list control group. Select church leaders at each church were trained by Dr. Tucker's Health Psychology Research Team to be Health Empowerment Coaches (HECs) who would then implement the Health-Smart Behavior Program among fellow church and community members.

At the start of the program all participants complete a baseline assessment battery, and have their baseline weight, height, and blood pressure taken by the HECs who received training on how to accurately take participant health information. Following baseline data collection the two intervention churches begin the 8 week program, while the two wait-list control churches do nothing related to the program for 8 weeks. Throughout the course of the program the HECs engage in the following components of the Health-Smart Behavior Program: (a) providing participants with individual/family consultation on ways to overcome the assessed barriers to health-smart behaviors; (b) showing and discussing each of the five sections of the Family Health Self-Empowerment Health-Smart Behavior DVD during weekly sessions; (c) reviewing and discussing the Health-Smart Behavior Resource Guide during weekly sessions; (d) providing weekly group physical activities (e.g., Zumba dancing) at the participating church or at a nearby community setting; and (e) collaborating with the church pastor to give a health-smart tip at every church service and include a health-smart tip on every church service program/bulletin. Following the 8 weeks, all participants have their data collected again and the HECs in the wait-list control churches begin the implementation of the 8 week program. All of the aforementioned tools, including the DVD, were constructed by Dr. Tucker and her research teams and are available in both Spanish and English.

The main goals of this program were to increase overall health and participation in health promoting behaviors among racial/ethnic minority groups and low-income individuals and families living in Bronx, NY. Additionally, each participating church will serve as a Health-Smart Church Center for promoting health among families and community members in the Bronx area. The Health-Smart Church Program has already been successfully implemented in 10 churches in Gainesville, FL. The program has been shown to be effective in significantly reducing weight, BMI, and systolic blood pressure, and in significantly increasing the occurrence of health-smart behaviors (e.g., reduced fat and sugar intake; engaging in physical activities) among adult and child family members. The underlying Health-Smart Behavior Program model has already been successfully implemented in YMCAs and community centers in 25 states across the nation, is currently being tested in medical clinics, and, in the near future, will be tested in schools. Development of the Health-Smart Behavior Program was funded by the Blue Foundation for a Healthy Florida and the PepsiCo Foundation.