

## From Good to Great: Using QI to Standardize *Prescription for Health*



The high cost of living in Washtenaw County, Michigan makes it difficult for low income families to purchase fresh produce, contributing to health risks and poorer health overall. In 2010, only 10% of households with an annual income of less than \$35,000 reported eating five or more fruits and vegetables per day. In addition, the primary care clinics serving low income residents had limited knowledge about affordable, local resources for fresh healthy food.

### Prescribing Fruits and Vegetables

Staff at [Washtenaw County Public Health](#) (WCPH) used grants from the [Michigan Department of Community Health](#) and the [Kresge Foundation](#) to create the *Prescription for Health* program. The goal was to improve access to local and affordable produce by building connections among primary care, public health, and local agriculture. Primary care providers identify patients with chronic disease most in need of education about nutrition and access to affordable sources for fresh produce and write “prescriptions” to encourage them to consume more fruits and vegetables. Those identified attend an educational enrollment session to discuss individual nutrition goals and program details. The enrollment sessions are led by WCPH with assistance from community health advocates—members of the local community trained by WCPH to help engage the local population in public health initiatives. Following the enrollment session, each participant receives \$50 in tokens to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers’ markets between June and October; WCPH compensates the farmers for the tokens they collect in exchange for fresh produce. WCPH staff and community health advocates conduct post-program follow-up interviews with participants to measure their progress towards healthy living goals.



~1 cup = Average increase in daily consumption of fruits and vegetables

During the first two years of the program (2011 and 2012), *Prescription for Health* proved successful in using farmers’ market referrals to reinforce medical advice about healthy eating. Participants reported that their average daily consumption of fruits and vegetables increased by nearly one cup. In addition, participants stated that increased access to fresh produce and support from program staff helped them to embrace healthier habits. *Prescription for Health* also generated \$26,000 in new sales for local farmers’ markets. Bolstered by these early successes, WCPH identified several areas for improvement going into the program’s third year, and chose to use quality improvement (QI) methods to accomplish these goals:

- 7 Simplify and standardize the program enrollment process
- 7 Assign specific roles and responsibilities to WCPH and clinic administrative staff to further standardize program implementation
- 7 Educate clinic administrative staff about the benefits of the program (e.g., affordability, access to fresh local produce, development of individual nutrition goals)
- 7 Leverage community health advocates’ connections to establish a peer-to-peer network among participants and community members to build social support for healthy eating habits
- 7 Improve interdisciplinary collaboration and participation among clinics, in order to increase program enrollment and effectiveness

*“In a tight fiscal environment, QI can be your friend.”*

**Sharon P. Sheldon,**  
Health Promotion Disease Prevention  
Division Administrator

In 2012, *Prescription for Health* received the Public Health Foundation’s (PHF) [Future of Public Health Award](#) as an outstanding initiative with measurable outcomes benefiting the future of public health through applied QI. PHF’s QI expert, [Sonja Armbruster](#), trained WCPH staff to address their identified areas for improvement using QI methods:

- 7 An **AIM statement** was used to pinpoint an area for QI to focus the team’s energy and avoid losing time addressing unrelated issues.
- 7 A **flow chart** was used to visually depict all the steps involved in the enrollment process to pinpoint problematic areas and opportunities for QI. After examining the flow chart, the team decided to incorporate a social support component by establishing a peer-to-peer network among participants through bi-weekly follow-ups to support healthy eating habits and reinforce individual nutrition goals.

# Story From the Field

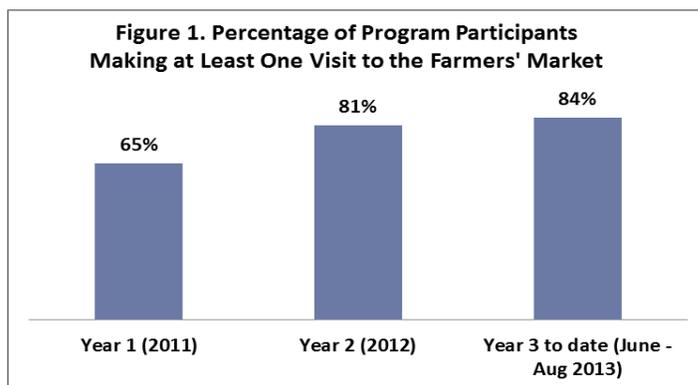
- 7 A **RACI chart** was used to identify the individual roles and responsibilities. Members of the clinic administrative staff were assigned one of four roles (responsible, accountable, consulted, or informed) related to steps in the enrollment process. Steps included displaying program promotional material, recruiting patients, scheduling enrollment sessions, supervising group enrollment sessions, and assisting with follow-up calls.
- 7 The **Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle** is a four-step model for creating and implementing change. WCPH used PDSA to develop and test the enrollment process flow chart and the RACI chart.

## Implementing Change

With the goal of standardizing the new enrollment process, WCPH used QI tools to help clinics become knowledgeable about *Prescription for Health* and local food resources. This led to an increase in patient referrals and program utilization. By August 2013, 84% of the program participants had visited farmers markets to redeem prescriptions at least once—already an increase from previous years, with two months remaining in the season (see Figure 1). Community businesses, like the local farms, have continued to benefit from this program, as each new participant brings more repeat business. With a foundation in open communication between healthcare providers and public health workers, *Prescription for Health* has improved the overall working relationship between these two sectors, and is paving the way for future collaboration.

## Prescribing Health Beyond Washtenaw County

In the months ahead, WCPH plans to build on their QI success as they prepare for accreditation through the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#). WCPH is also fielding inquiries from other local health departments and assisting in the development of three spinoff programs. The spinoffs include a Detroit-based project to engage the Latino community by translating the program's marketing and educational materials into Spanish and including an onsite *mercado* (Spanish word for market).



Group	Benefits from <i>Prescription for Health</i>
Practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase knowledge of and connections to local food resources.</li></ul>
Patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve access to local and affordable produce.</li><li>• Increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.</li><li>• Increase knowledge of nutrition and healthy lifestyle.</li></ul>
Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase business and generated new sales.</li></ul>
Washtenaw County Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build connections among primary care, public health, local agriculture and community health advocates.</li><li>• Improve knowledge and use of quality improvement tools.</li></ul>

## Related Resources

- 7 Prescription for Health Program: <http://www.ewashtenaw.org/prescription-for-health>
- 7 Future of Public Health Awards: [http://www.phf.org/programs/futureaward/Pages/Future\\_of\\_Public\\_Health\\_Award.aspx](http://www.phf.org/programs/futureaward/Pages/Future_of_Public_Health_Award.aspx)
- 7 PHF Technical Assistance: [http://www.phf.org/consulting/Pages/qi\\_services.aspx](http://www.phf.org/consulting/Pages/qi_services.aspx)

## About the Future of Public Health Awards

PHF's 2012 Future of Public Health Award recognized promising proposed initiatives in public health that utilize QI to influence positive outcomes in the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) Winnable Battles](#). Award winners received onsite technical assistance to build capacity in QI and advance programs to improve outcomes. To learn more about the program and other PHF services, visit <http://www.phf.org>.

## Acknowledgements

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