

# Spectrum of Prevention: A Model for Planning Public Health Interventions

It has long been recognized that individual education aimed at changing behavior is not enough to effectively prevent injury or illness. Programs also need to address environmental factors, which are some of the largest determinants of health status, and actively involve the targeted community in the planning and implementation of activities and efforts.

The *Spectrum of Prevention* offers a framework on which to develop multi-level public health programs that integrate individual, professional, organizational, and community-wide efforts. The *Spectrum* ranges from some of the more familiar interventions such as individual and community education to long-term solutions such as policy and legislative changes. Legislation cannot be enacted and implemented without well-informed, involved, committed and vocal people working together. By grouping these separate approaches together, a preventive health program builds on the strengths of each level and promotes permanent, effective change. In short, the whole become greater than the sum of the parts.

## ***Levels of the Spectrum of Prevention***

1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills
2. Promoting Community Education
3. Educating Providers
4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks
5. Changing Organizational Practices
6. Mobilizing Neighborhoods and Communities
7. Influencing Policy Legislation

### **1. Strengthening Individual Knowledge and Skills**

Strengthening individual knowledge and skills means assisting individuals to increase their knowledge and capacity to prevent injury. Many health providers and community agencies currently use this strategy through education, counseling, and other individual services to encourage individuals to change their behavior.

### **2. Promoting Community Education**

Promoting community education means reaching groups of people with information and resources to build support for healthier behavior and community norms. Since the media is so predominant in our society, skillful attention to the media can advance community education efforts.

### **3. Training Providers**

Training providers means educating those who influence others working in the injury prevention arena, whether they be professionals, paraprofessionals, community activists or peers. It is critical to ensure that those who provide training, advice, or serve as role models have the information, skills, and motivation to effectively promote injury prevention with youth, parents, colleagues, and policy makers.

#### **4. Fostering Coalitions and Networks**

Fostering coalitions and networks means creating or strengthening the ability of people and organizations to join together to work on a specific problem. By strengthening the collaboration among diverse partners, coalitions and networks are useful for accomplishing a broad range of goals that reach beyond the capacity of any individual member's agency. These goals may range from information sharing to coordination of services or from community education to advocacy for major regulatory changes.

#### **5. Changing Organizational Practices**

Changing organizational practices means changing internal business and agency regulations and norms. Looking at the practices of key groups, such as law enforcement, health departments, and schools has potential for affecting the health, safety, and satisfaction of the greater community. Also every organization should look at its own practices and see what could be changed or strengthened within their organization.

#### **6. Mobilizing Neighborhoods and Communities**

Mobilizing neighborhoods and communities means facilitating local efforts to achieve an identified injury prevention action, practice, or policy.

#### **7. Influencing Policy and Legislation**

Influencing policy and legislation means working to change laws or regulations at the local, state, and national levels. Sometimes the greatest improvement in injury prevention, affecting the largest number of people, can be accomplished by attention to policy issues.

#### **How the Levels Work Together**

The activities at each level of the Spectrum can support one another. Success at one level can encourage activities which lead to further change at other levels. For example, "media advocacy" is a strategic use of the media for community education (level 2) that is directed at a change of policy (level 7). Effective policy discussions often lead to further individual and community education (levels 1 and 2) through media attention to an issue. Policy change may need the broader support of the community (level 6). When a policy is changed, it often changes organizations' practices (level 5) and creates the need to train providers (level 3) on the implementation of new policy.

Given that injury problems are often complex, the best solutions are usually those that are comprehensive. As such, the most effective prevention activities are those that address an issue at all seven levels of the Spectrum - as the levels fit together, build upon one another and together produce greater change. Some projects work through a coalition to address all levels of the Spectrum. Each individual organization may work at one or more levels but as a community, county, or even statewide coalition, they may address an array of levels. Either independently or through collaborative partnerships, projects can identify and address gaps in the Spectrum and in time, address injury prevention at all seven levels. It is important that programs identify their project's efforts within the context of the Spectrum of Prevention.