

Allina Health Neighborhood Health Connection™

Findings from the 2019 Neighborhood Health Connection Grant Program Evaluation Survey

The Allina Health Neighborhood Health Connection (NHC) grants were created to help individuals build social connections and participate in activities that encourage physical activity and healthy eating. Funded activities varied widely (e.g., community gardening, sports and exercise groups, cooking and nutrition classes) and reached different populations. Similar to previous evaluations, results from the survey suggest positive changes in social connections, physical activity, and healthy eating occurred for a majority of participants. Additionally, participants who took part in a higher number of activities were more likely to report positive changes.

Evaluation methods

At the end of the grant-funded activities, written or online surveys were administered to adults (age 18 or older) who participated in two or more program activities. Of the 68 grantees that were funded, three did not administer the survey because their participants were under the age of 18 or attended less than 2 sessions, making them ineligible to participate. Another five grantees were unresponsive or never returned surveys. 843 of the approximately 1,217 eligible participants (i.e., adults age 18 or older who participated in an activity at least twice) completed the survey, a response rate of 69%. Online surveys were completed by 211 participants and paper surveys by 631. A total of 160 surveys were completed in Spanish and were translated to English and included in this report. Some grantees had a response rate lower than the overall rate. Frequency of participation in the NHC activities was categorized as high (participants attended 6 or more activity sessions), moderate (4-5 sessions), or low (2-3 sessions).

Limitations

Caution should be used when interpreting the results as they may not represent the thoughts of all participants who were eligible for the survey. The results of the significance testing should be interpreted with caution as slightly more than half of the participants completed the survey. In addition, additional factors, such as program effectiveness, may contribute to observed differences between groups.

Reach of the NHC Healthy Activity grants

In 2019, 68 NHC-funded grantees reached an estimated 3,699 participants. Similar to previous years, the majority of survey respondents were female (79%), white (65%), and age 50 and older (53%). Additionally, most participants spoke English (76%) and did not receive public support (65%). A majority of participants rated their health as good or better (35% good, 36% very good, 16% excellent).

Survey results suggest differences in participants' social connections and healthy behaviors based on dosage of participation. Those who attended six or more program activities were more likely to report improved social connections and healthy behaviors. Other factors not directly assessed in the evaluation, such as program effectiveness, may also contribute to these observed differences

Success building social connections

A majority of survey respondents reported positive changes in social connections. Nearly all participants reported that as a result of participating in this activity, they strengthened current connections (89%) and met new people through the activity (90%). Of those that made new connections, over half were “very confident” they would stay in touch with at least one person they met (58%).

- Participants who took part at a high frequency were significantly more likely to say they connected with people they hadn't known before (94%), compared to those who participated at a moderate (87%) or low frequency (86%).*
- Those who took part at a high frequency were also significantly more likely to say they were "very confident" (62%) they will stay in touch with at least one person they met, compared to those who participated at a moderate (58%) or low frequency (48%).*
- In terms of social connectedness, the results for those who receive public support and those who do not receive public support were nearly identical. Ninety-one percent of people receiving public support said they made new connections, compared to 92% of those not receiving public support. Of those, 59% of those receiving public support and 58% of those not receiving public support said they were "very confident" they would stay in touch with at least one person they met. Among both people receiving public support and those who do not, a majority of respondents (89%) said they strengthened connections with people they already knew.

Success improving healthy eating

Results suggest participants made positive changes to their healthy eating behavior. Seventy-one percent of participants said that as a result of the NHC activity they eat healthy meals and snacks more often than six months ago, and 24% said they eat healthy meals and snacks about the same as six months ago.

- At the end of the activity, the majority of participants said they follow a healthy diet at least some of the time (81%). Fewer said they follow a healthy diet occasionally (15%) or not at all (4%).

- Participants with a high level of participation were significantly more likely to say they ate healthy meals and snacks more often than six months ago (75%), as compared to those with a moderate (69%) or low (62%) level of participation.*
- A similar percentage of participants who receive public support and those who do not receive public support said they eat more healthy meals and snacks now than six months ago (69% and 73%, respectively).

Success improving physical activity

Results also suggest participants made positive changes in their physical activity. Over half of participants (62%) reported they were more physically active than six months ago. Thirty-seven percent were doing about the same amount of physical activity.

- At the end of the activity, 26% of participants said they currently get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five to seven days in an average week, 39% said they get physical activity three to four days per week, and 30% said they get physical activity one to two days per week.
- Participants who took part at a high frequency were more likely to say they were more physically active than six months ago (70%), compared to those who took part at a moderate frequency (59%) and low frequency (46%).*
- Participants who do not receive public support were significantly more likely to say they were doing the same amount of physical activity as six months ago (40%) than those receiving public support (32%).*

* Significance tests were conducted using a chi-squared test. Differences are statistically significant at $p < .05$.