



## R.E.A.C.H. NEWS

**March 2015**

### **REACH Obesity & Hypertension Demonstration Project Newsletter**

The Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Demonstration Project is a 3-year grant from the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to develop and implement strategies that reduce obesity and hypertension among Black and Latino residents of Boston. While the grant promotes health city-wide, the focus of REACH is in the communities of Mattapan, Dorchester, Roxbury, Hyde Park, and East Boston.

REACH, a partnership between [the Boston Public Health Commission](#), [REACH Community Coalition](#), [the YMCA of Greater Boston](#), and the Harvard School of Public Health's [Prevention Research Center](#) and [Department of Nutrition](#), focuses on the reduction of health inequities through five core initiatives: Community Physical Activity, Clinical Hypertension, Healthy Beverages & Sodium Reduction, Out-of-School Time, and Communications.

Local organizations, including five [Violence Intervention & Prevention groups](#), community health centers and hospitals, the [Boston Transportation Department](#), [Boston Parks and Recreation Department](#), three supermarket chains, over 60 out-of-school time programs, over 30 child care programs, [Health Care Without Harm](#), [City Fresh](#), and community-based organizations, are integral to the success of this work.

#### **Visit the Updated REACH Website**

The REACH Project has a newly re-designed website! You'll find more information on each of our initiatives, resources, and learn how you and your organization can get involved in helping us create healthier environments.

Check it out [here](#).

#### **Out of School Time Initiative**



The [Out of School Nutrition and Physical Activity](#) (OSNAP) program kicked off its 2014-2015 school year series in October. The OSNAP program, which is free and open to all out of school and afterschool programs in Boston, supports staff in making the healthy choice the default choice for students by guiding them through nutrition and physical activity practice and policy changes.

This year, we've expanded the program by engaging systems-based afterschool organizations that oversee at least five afterschool programs in Boston. Through this effort, we have partnered with the [Boys and Girls Club of Boston](#), the [Boston Center for Youth and Families](#), [Bird Street Community Center](#), and [Imagine That](#) to support their sites in making systems-wide nutrition and physical activity changes.

Our first round of Learning Communities wrapped up in December 2014 with a record number of 68 programs in participation, 46 of which joined OSNAP for the first time!

The second round of learning communities resumed mid-February. Sites will work on developing the skills they need to create healthy environments and begin thinking about policies to support the healthy changes they wish to make. Many afterschool programs are focusing on increasing vigorous physical activity, decreasing sugary drink consumption, and promoting water among the youth served. Programs like Boys and Girls Club of Boston and Imagine That are particularly interested in enhancing staff and parent engagement to reinforce the healthy messages children are receiving in their afterschool programs. We look forward to engaging with partners dedicated to extending the mission of OSNAP into the Boston neighborhoods they serve!

It's not too late to join OSNAP. Please contact [Anam Bhatti](#) to learn about how your afterschool program can get involved.

### Fit Kit Program

[Fit Kits](#) are large mesh bags filled with sports equipment for community use to increase opportunities for physical activity. The REACH Community Physical Activity Team has been working with organizations across the city to find ways to integrate Fit Kits into programs and special events. Many are using Fit Kits for games: the Bowdoin Street Health Center VIP team offers Fit Kits during monthly

family Game Nights to engage residents in physical activity, and the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing hosted weekly Sidewalk Game events where kids learned to play traditional street games using Fit Kit equipment.

In addition to offering Fit Kits to residents, our organizations share them with other partners in their network. Sociedad Latina has lent their Fit Kits out to the Family Van, Whittier Street Health Center, Mission Grammar School, and Timilty Middle School.

You can find Fit Kits at the following organizations:

- [Project RIGHT](#)
- [Madison Park Development Corporation](#)
- [Bowdoin Street Health Center](#)
- [Mattapan Community Health Center](#)
- [The Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition](#)
- [The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative](#)
- [First Teacher](#)
- [Gilbert Albert Community Center](#)
- [The Black Ministerial Alliance](#)
- [The Neighborhood of Affordable Housing](#)
- [Sociedad Latina](#)
- [The bWell Center](#) at Boston Medical Center



### **We've expanded our Fit Kit program!**

The [Appalachian Mountain Club](#), known for connecting residents with fun outdoor opportunities, has recently started programming here in Boston. [The Outdoors Rx Program](#), which allows healthcare providers to prescribe outdoor activities as a way to promote active living, hosts free outdoor events throughout the year for families and kids in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. They will be incorporating Fit Kits into games, scavenger hunts, and other activities.

We'd also like to thank the REACH and VIP staff at [Mattapan Community Health Center](#), who have brought Fit Kits to the [Mattahunt Community Center](#) and the [Young Achievers School](#)!

For more information on Fit Kits and to learn about how your

organization can be a Fit Kit site, please contact [Jose Masso](#).



### Healthy Food & Beverages

This winter, our team has been busy working with various sectors to make healthy food and beverages readily available. Five community and faith based organizations, six youth organizations, seven community health centers, ten YMCA facilities, and nine hospitals will work toward making healthy practice and policy changes. Specifically, they will work toward goals of increasing access to water, low-sodium food options, and healthy beverages, raise awareness of these efforts through education and promotion, and develop policies that support healthy environments.

So far, many of organizations have committed to serving water at all times, no longer serving sugary drinks, and offering healthier food options to staff and visitors. A few organizations have gone beyond this and are already creating policies to emphasize their commitment to health and wellness!

You can find resources for you and your organization on making healthy beverage and low sodium changes [here](#).

The [Boston Public Health Commission](#), [Harvard School of Public Health Prevention Research Center](#), and [Health Care Without Harm](#) hosted a webinar on Dec 18th on healthy vending. We had 27 attendees representing 20 different organizations. Our presenters shared healthy vending practices and policies being adopted by several local organizations, and discussed how vending companies can best support

client needs.

For more information on how your organization can make healthy changes, or if you're interested in a recording of the vending webinar, please contact [Nineequa Blanding](#).

### Get Active! Program

It's been over six months since we first started the [Get Active! program](#) to connect hypertensive Black and Latino patients with free YMCA gym memberships to control their blood pressure. To accomplish this work, we have partnered with five healthcare sites, [the Family Van, Geiger Gibson Health Center](#), [Neponset Health Center](#), [Mattapan Community Health Center](#), and [Whittier Street Health Center](#), to facilitate referrals.

As of February 27th, our five sites have referred a total of 566 patients to the YMCA.

### Hypertension Learning Collaborative

The REACH Project's Hypertension Initiative hosts bi-monthly learning collaboratives, inviting case managers, health care providers, and community health workers to discuss improved care for hypertensive patients.



The most recent learning collaborative was held on December 12th and featured [Dr. Susan Redline](#), MD, MPH, the Peter C. Farrell Professor of Sleep Medicine at Harvard Medical School and the Director of the Sleep and Cardiovascular Medicine Program at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Dr. Redline presented her work on sleep apnea, highlighting the strong association of sleep apnea with hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and other chronic diseases, the higher rates of sleep apnea among Blacks and African Americans, and the importance of screening patients.

The next Learning Collaborative will be on April 10th. Our guest will be [Dr. David Williams](#) of Harvard University and the Harvard School of Public Health. He will be speaking about the role of racism on cardiovascular health. For more details, please contact [Nineequa Blanding](#).

### Contact Information

For questions regarding the REACH Obesity & Hypertension Project, please

contact Director Nineequa Blanding ([nblanding@bphc.org](mailto:nblanding@bphc.org); 617-534-9681)

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