

Study shows how to make statewide health campaigns more effective

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Researchers from The Miriam Hospital have found that adding evidence-based weight loss strategies to a statewide wellness campaign improves weight loss outcomes among participants. The study and its findings are published online in advance of print in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Lead researcher Tricia Leahey, Ph.D., and her colleagues chose to conduct a study among participants in Rhode Island's annual, three-month statewide health campaign. Called Shape Up Rhode Island (SURI), the campaign was founded in 2005 and takes a grass roots approach in reaching Rhode Islanders.

Leahey says, "Given their reach, statewide wellness initiatives like Shape Up Rhode Island have the potential to improve health in large numbers of individuals; however, weight losses produced are typically modest. Thus, we examined whether adding evidence-based [weight loss](#) strategies to a statewide wellness campaign improves weight loss outcomes. We found that such an approach was effective and could, therefore, significantly improve the public health impact of these campaigns."

As a researcher with the Weight Control and Diabetes Research Center of The Miriam Hospital, Leahey led the randomized trial. For the study, 230 participants were recruited from the 2011 SURI campaign and were randomly assigned to one of three groups: the standard SURI program, the SURI program plus an evidence-based internet behavioral weight loss program, or SURI plus the evidence-based internet program with the option to attend weekly group weight loss sessions.

At the end of three months, weight loss differed among all three groups. Both of the evidence-based approaches resulted in a significantly greater weight loss compared to the SURI campaign alone. In addition, the evidence-based programs increased the percentage of individuals

who achieved a 5 percent, or clinically meaningful, weight loss. Among those who were using the evidence-based internet program in addition to SURI, 42 percent of the participants achieved a 5 percent weight goal; as did 54 percent of the group who also attended the weekly group sessions. Among participants using SURI alone, only 7 percent achieved a 5 percent weight loss.

Of the findings, Leahey says, "We show that adding evidence-based behavioral weight loss strategies to a statewide campaign improves the magnitude of weight loss and increases the percentage of individuals who achieve a clinically meaningful weight loss (i.e., a weight loss that is associated with reduced risk for diabetes and other health problems) six-fold. Moreover, the internet-based approach (i.e., that did not involve weekly group sessions) was the most cost effective."

Leahey concludes, "The results of this study are important because they show that incorporating evidence-based strategies into wide-reaching wellness initiatives could have a meaningful impact on the [health](#) of our communities."

Provided by Lifespan

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