Focus Groups to

Listen & Learn

Eleanor Long, MSPH (LAC/DPH MCAH)

Sharen Anthony, MFCC, RD (PHFE/WIC)

Cynthia Harding, MPH (LAC/DPH MCAH)
Presenter Disclosures

Eleanor Long, MSPH
Health Education Coordinator
Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health Programs
Los Angeles County Dept. Public Health

“No relationships to disclose”
Barriers to Healthy Weight

- Results from Focus Groups and Surveys with Los Angeles
- Low-Income Latinas
- Conducted in WIC Centers
Health Consequences of Obesity

- **Complications of pregnancy**
  - Increased risk of death in both baby and mother
  - 10 fold increased risk of maternal high blood pressure
  - ↑ risk for gestational diabetes
  - Problems during labor & delivery
  - High birth weight (≥ 9 lb) baby
  - Baby with birth defects

*Achieve a healthy weight prior to pregnancy!*
Los Angeles County MCAH
Selected as one of 8 national pilot sites
Healthy Weight for Women of Reproductive Age Action Learning Collaborative

Funding from:
• CDC’s Division Reproductive Health
• Association Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) and CityMatCH

In order to:
• Build state and local capacity to help women of reproductive age achieve healthy weight before, during, and after pregnancy.
Why is healthy weight an issue that we think important in LAC?

- Extreme disparities
- Food ‘deserts’ in low-income communities
- Obesity epidemic
- Car culture
- Media driven eating habits established early
Our commitments!

- Support worksite health promotion
- Support community-based interventions
- Develop leadership to unite:
  - Community Leaders
  - Public Health professionals
  - Medical Providers
- Promote healthy weight messages
Why Focus Group Research?

• Produces insights for outreach strategies
• Learn about target audience
• Inexpensive, but
  • Had to work in partnership
  • Had to obtain incentives
  • Had to use volunteers (MPH students)
• Easy to implement
Methodology

• **Study Design**
  - Qualitative research – focus groups
  - Exploratory focus group approach 2007
  - Testing messages 2008
  - Self-administered surveys at end of groups
• **Sampling**
  - Convenience sampling

• **Settings**
  - WIC sites in Los Angeles County
Hispanic/Latina Focus Groups Findings
Latina Focus Groups Findings

• Cultural assimilation (*1st Generation*)
  ➔ Adopting new lifestyles
  ➔ Developing a habit of eating out

• Acculturation (*2nd Generation*)
  ➔ Diminished cooking skills
  ➔ As children, developed a taste for fast foods
• **Family Norms**
  ➔ *Obesity runs in blood – generation to generation*

• **Nutrition education**
  ➔ *Desired culturally appropriate nutrition education in a group session*
  
  *Quick (15 minute) preparation!*
  
  ➔ *Preferred Spanish-speaking providers*
Barriers to Healthy Eating

- Fast Food
- Cost – Economy
- Lack cooking skills
- Advertisements
- Time
- Lack cooking appliances
- “Excuses”
Barriers to Physical Activity

- Time
- Exhaustion
- Lack of childcare
- Work schedule (late hours)

Positive Changes 2007-2008
- Lack of access to safe parks (less often cited)
Creating and testing Messages

• Check-list with 10 evidence-based strategies
• Listed barriers
• Offered solutions.
• Tested messages.

• Each week, brochure was modified to reflect participants’ feedback.
• Tested – Modified – Tested - Modified
Findings:

• Common themes
• Perceptions
• Barriers to Healthy Eating
• Barriers to Exercise

• What’s a barrier, what’s an excuse?
Barrier Identified in Focus Groups:

High Cost Healthy Food:

• Not seen as a true barrier to eating healthy.

• Affordable produce in their neighborhood.

• However, healthy fast-food options are more expensive than less-healthy fast-food.
Barrier Identified in Focus Groups:

Availability of Healthy Food:

- *Not* a reality for many participants.
- Latino markets and street corners have good produce.
- Barrier exists when relying on public transportation or walking.

- Wanted healthy and low-cost **fast-food** options.
Barrier Identified in Focus Groups:

Cooking: Time & Knowledge

• Women prepare the meals
• Common themes children did not like healthy foods and that each family member wanted something different.

• Women need the skills to shop for and cook quick, affordable, tasteful, and culturally-appropriate healthy meals.
Barrier Identified in Focus Groups: Exercise:
Safe Neighborhoods & Cost

• Serious lack of exercise.
• Dismissed lack of safe spaces to exercise as an excuse. (difference between 2007 and 2008)
• Cost of equipment or gym membership was not a true barrier. However, gyms were inconvenient.
• Men exercise, not women.
Barrier Identified in Focus Groups:

Exercise: Time & Motivation

• **Motivation**

• **Too tired** - work and children.

• **TV watching.**

• **Social support** was very commonly mentioned as an effective way to motivate women to exercise.
Looking Forward - Implications:

• Knowledge
  – Strategies to incorporate healthy behaviors into busy life

• Skills
  – Cooking, self-awareness skills (journaling, etc.)

• Social Support

• Cultural Sensitivity

• “Where to walk/exercise in your area” guide
Looking Forward - Implications:

• **Stages of Change:**
  – High levels of body satisfaction, even when women self-identified as overweight.

• **Motivation:**
  – What values/messages/information would move Latina women to the next stage?

• **Awareness:**
  – Checklist popular
  – Suggests that self-awareness may help to motivate.
Looking Forward - Implications:

• **Addressing convenience:**
  – Eating out, especially fast food,
  – Educate women about the best eat-out options.

• **Cooking Skills:**
  – Offering classes to teach women to cook quick, convenient healthy meals that taste good.

• **Social Support for Exercise:**
  – Helping women to organize exercise groups.
  – Worksite wellness programs!
Major Implications

• Build upon existing materials
• Teach health consequences of overweight
• Mobilize leaders
• Improve physical environment
• Use trusted venues (churches)
• Create worksite wellness culture
Future Plans

- Continue Collaboration
  - Empower
  - Listen
  - Share
  - Acknowledge
- Develop Systems to Support Behavior
  - Support Health Policy
Our partners include:

State of CA Department of Public Health – MCH/OFP
Los Angeles County Department of Public Health – many programs
Promotora Organizations
Special Interest Coalitions
Demonstration Projects

Kaiser Permanente
California Medical Association
Insurance Oversight
University - UCLA
Hospitals and Clinics
WIC
Questions?

To reach Eleanor
213-639-6459
elong@ph.lacounty.gov