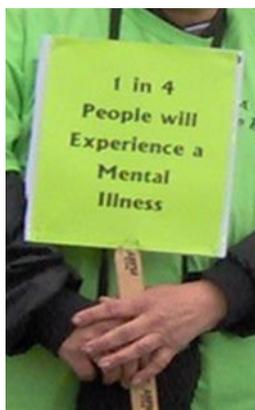


Collaboration Plays Key Role for I CAN Prevent Diabetes Class



Many of those diagnosed with mental health issues also suffer from lifestyle-related diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. As a result, mental health consumers die an average of twenty-five years earlier than the rest of the population.ⁱ Few mental health settings provide lifestyle interventions, possibly due to the lack of information regarding how to do so, lack of resources and training, and the misperception that individuals with mental health issues are unable or unwilling to participate in weight loss treatment.ⁱⁱ

Knowing that many mental health consumers are at risk for diabetes, PartnerSHIP 4 Health (PS4H), local public health and community partners in Becker, Clay, Otter Tail and Wilkin counties, partnered with Lakeland Mental Health Center (LMHC), a non-profit organization providing behavioral healthcare services in West Central MN, to offer I CAN Prevent Diabetes (ICPD - the MN version of the National Diabetes Prevention Program) classes to their clients.

These classes offer prevention education and support for people with pre-diabetes in order to delay Type 2 diabetes by fostering changes in physical activity and nutrition. Colleen Kennedy, LMHC Mental Health Practitioner and ICPD Lifestyle Coach, states, "Understanding and accepting the interconnection between mental and physical health is necessary in promoting improved well-being. It is an honor to join alongside our community members as they are on their journey towards a stronger, healthier, happier self."

PS4H and LMHC scheduled an "I CAN Prevent Diabetes" class kick-off date, displayed posters at LMHC, and engaged clinicians in making referrals. However, the registration deadline passed with zero registrations. PS4H and LMHC decided to collaborate with *A Place to Belong*, a non-profit social club for those with serious mental illness. A conversation was held with the executive director to gain permission to hold the class at the club.

Several club members joined the conversation indicating their interest in attending the class, and their willingness to invite other members. Members were queried regarding what would motivate them to register for the class and to continue with the class through the 24 sessions. Members indicated that certificates of attendance, farmer's market certificates for fruits and vegetables, tennis shoes, and electronic wrist trackers would encourage attendance. The class was added to the monthly calendar posted on the club bulletin board.

PS4H and LMHC engaged a University of Minnesota Extension Lifestyle Coach to secure written materials, weigh class members, provide healthy snacks and physical activity breaks, and track data. The organizations connected with the local farmer's market, Service Food Market, Thrivent Financial, and Wal-Mart to secure incentives.

Eleven club members registered and participated in the kick-off session. Class participation remained stable through the 16 weekly sessions with an average of five attending per session. However, during the 8 post-core monthly sessions, numbers averaged 1-3 members, revealing the difficulty related to long-term retention. The Lifestyle Coach made phone call reminders to encourage participant's attendance.

Success is revealed as the class participants report that they now review food labels in order to make healthier decisions while grocery shopping, and have increased their daily physical activity. One participant stated, "Boy, it's been a real growing process for me...learning about fats, making sure that I watch my fats to prevent weight gain, keeping track of my fats, using the book to look up calories, and learning about serving sizes. I also push myself to exercise and go for walks around Lake Alice."



ⁱ National Alliance on Mental Illness. Mental Health By The Numbers <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>

ⁱⁱ Radke AQ, Parks J, Ruter TJ. A call for improved prevention and reduction of obesity among persons with serious mental illness. *Psychiatric Services*. 2010;61(6):617-619. doi: 10.1176/appi.ps.61.6.617

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