

# Evaluation of the 2017 New York State YMCA Foundation Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) Infrastructure Initiative

## Introduction

- The obesity epidemic continues to be a significant U.S. public health problem<sup>1</sup>
- A child's environment plays a key role in their health status throughout the life span
- A social-ecological approach with a focus on modifying children's environments to make them more health-promoting is widely accepted as the guiding framework for childhood obesity prevention<sup>2</sup>
- Policy, systems, and environmental change (PSE) interventions are obesity prevention best practices<sup>3</sup>
- YMCAs are key community partners in these strategies given their widespread prevalence throughout the country
- YMCAs nationally adopted Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards for their child care programs in an effort to reduce childhood obesity<sup>4</sup>
- The New York State YMCA Foundation (the Foundation) was awarded funds through the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to provide funding to New York State (NYS) YMCA branches across NYS to assist them in implementing the HEPA standards



Map indicating Y sites that received HEPA funding

## Study Background

- The authors conducted an evaluation study of the 2017 NYS YMCA Foundation's statewide funding initiative to support YMCAs in their implementation of the HEPA standards
- The goal of the evaluation was to determine whether funding reduced barriers to implementing HEPA standards related to:
  - ❖ Reduction in the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages
  - ❖ Increase in family engagement
  - ❖ Improved eating and physical activity habits
  - ❖ Reduced screen time<sup>5</sup>
- The findings will be utilized to assist the Foundation in providing future funding for HEPA implementation

## Methods

- 2016-2017 community-engaged participatory action research study
- Participants recruited from YMCAs throughout NYS that received funding
- Recruitment via the NYS YMCA Foundation grantees
- Three different methods were used to gather qualitative and quantitative data:
  - ❖ Pre- and Post-assessments
  - ❖ RedCap evaluation survey
  - ❖ Semi-structured telephone interviews
- 156 pre/post assessments (online or paper survey), 77 RedCap evaluations, and 13 interviews were conducted
- Pre-post assessments created by the Y as a way to track changes that occurred before and after they were able to utilize funds
- Online RedCap survey to understand the funding process and the barriers and facilitators to implementation of the standards using the funding
- Qualitative phone interviews conducted with those involved with writing or implementing the grant
- Both deductive and inductive approaches to coding were used in the analysis of interview data

## Results

- 79% of respondents stated that HEPA standards were being implemented at their YMCA "to a great extent."
- 44% of respondents stated that all of their child care program staff are HEPA-trained. However, 36% of respondents stated that some of their HEPA-trained staff were no longer at their YMCA location.
- 77% of respondents stated that there were no barriers to purchasing items for this initiative
- 97% of respondents stated that if they could go back to the initial application, they would choose to purchase the same items - indicating the items purchased have been useful in their after-school programs.
- At post-assessment, there was a  $\geq 20\%$  increase in funded YMCAs stating they were: engaging parents/caregivers in HEPA; including healthy behavior role modeling in job descriptions for staff; reducing sugary drinks in the after-school program; having children serve themselves food/beverages (family-style).

Fig. 1 Grant Administration and Implementation by the Foundation

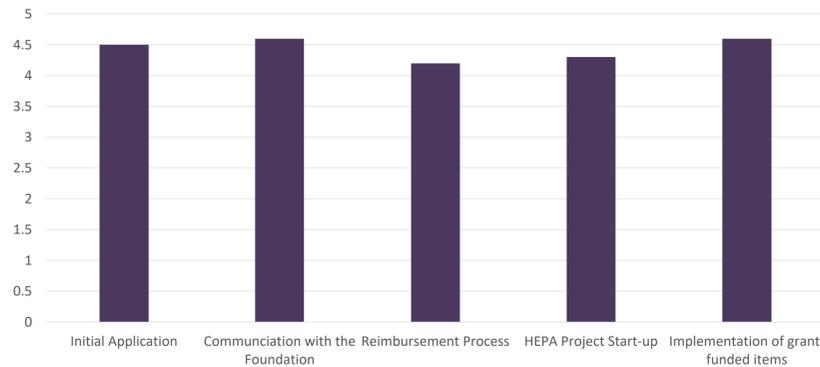
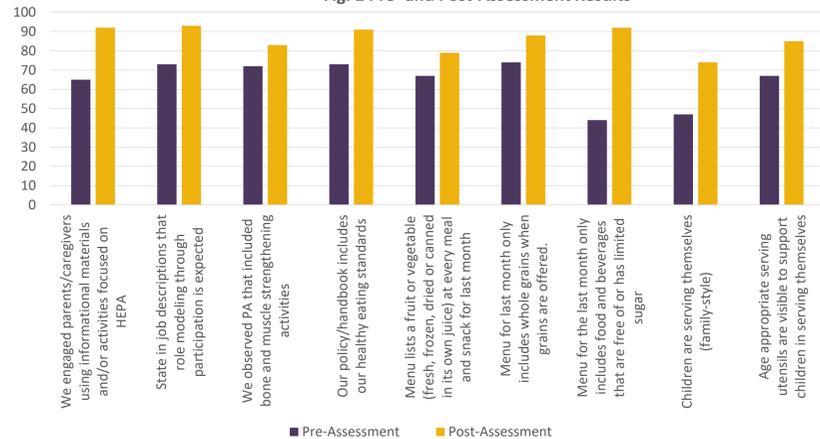


Fig. 1. Average rating of the grant-related processes for this initiative by YMCA grant-writers and implementers (5-point scale; 1= very poor, 3 = acceptable; 5 = very good; "Don't know" responses excluded from analysis)

Fig. 2 Pre- and Post-Assessment Results



### Sample Key Quotes from Semi-structured Interviews

- "Well-articulated booster shot. We would not have been able to implement CATCH (physical activity curriculum) without the grant."
- "Equipment has been able to get children involved longer in activities"
- "Implementing family style snacks for older kids to be able to help younger kids, and the younger kids are getting better at serving themselves."
- "We are able to provide more resources, structure to activities, and received positive parent feedback."
- "I think it's a great initiative and its especially important to get kids when they're young, and they're not getting that education at home. It's important that we catch them while they're here."

## Discussion and Limitations

- Despite multiple reminder attempts, it was not possible to obtain a 100% response rate for the online RedCap survey or post-assessment checklist
- We were told that some site directors did not have access to a computer contributing to the lower response rate for the evaluation survey
- Some pre-assessments had to be omitted as they were completed after the funding may have impacted their program
- Lack of Incentive to complete post-assessments may have contributed to lower response rates as programs had already received funding
- Due to the evaluation occurring soon after the YMCAs received funding, participants may not have had an opportunity to fully utilize the items purchased, therefore one cannot attribute changes from the pre-assessments and post-assessments exclusively to this initiative
- For privacy reasons we chose not audio record the telephone interviews. This may have resulted in missing data.
- Inclusion of "Don't know" option for survey responses allowed for no decision/opinion.
- Participants may not be representative of all perspectives at every level of the organization.

## Conclusions & Public Health Implications

- The findings from this study demonstrate that funding helped increase HEPA implementation in YMCA after-school programs.
- This initiative received positive feedback from evaluation participants.
- Participants provided concrete examples of how this initiative has benefited their YMCA associations, branches, and individual after-school programs and participants, such as encouraged them to be more physically active, provided more structured activity, diversified program activities, and allowed children to engage in family-style eating and serve themselves.
- This initiative helped YMCAs, even those already implementing the HEPA standards, to advance with HEPA implementation.
- Participating YMCAs expressed significant interest in and support for participating in future similar funding opportunities for HEPA implementation.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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