Success Stories
INCREATRING YOUTH HELMET USE in the Bristol Bay Area

In the winter of 2016-2017, several youth in the Bristol Bay region sustained severe injuries from snowmachine or all-terrain vehicle (ATV) crashes, one of which resulted in a death. A Community Health Aide (CHA) in the Bristol Bay village of Pilot Point had treated a number of youth in her village for head injuries. One of the risks noted for these events was the lack of a helmet when riding on ATVs and snowmachines.

To address this concern, the CHA contacted the Injury Prevention Specialist at the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation (BBAHC) asking if there were any helmets that could be given to the youth in her community. In the past simply providing helmets to community members had not resulted in long-term increases in helmet use, so they discussed enforcement and helmet style. Their conversations led to collaborations with the Village Council and community Village Public Safety Office (VPSO). Funding was found to purchase helmets, and popular styles and designs of helmets were evaluated. A community event was held where youth were allowed to choose the design of their helmet. After distributing the helmets, anecdotally there was an increase in voluntary helmet use by youth. It was noted that the youth enjoyed sharing the designs of their helmets.

The Village Council was interested in establishing a municipal ordinance to require helmet use by youth in the community. The Anchorage helmet law was used as a model, but there were concerns about the appropriateness of ticketing and fines as the penalty. A recommendation was made to require community service in place of ticketing, and the ordinance was passed. In Pilot Point, all youth under the age of 18 are now required to wear a helmet when riding on an ATV, snowmachine, or motorcycle.

As part of the enforcement effort, community members are allowed to report riders without helmets to the VPSO. The community service penalty includes assisting Elders or painting community buildings among other activities. The community service was often done with groups of youth working together. Since the ordinance was established, there have been no ATV or snowmachine-related head injuries at Pilot Point.

The BBAHC Injury Prevention Specialist subsequently worked on a new project in New Stuyahok in collaboration with the Tribal council, the local school, the Alaska Native Medical Center, and the ANTHC Injury Prevention Program. The collaborators developed an ATV safety curriculum adapted from ATV safety material created by the Arkansas Children’s Hospital. It was revised to be appropriate for Alaska Native youth in New Stuyahok, and adds a youth education component. If successful, this safety education may be considered for other communities.
INJURY PREVENTION TRAINING for COMMUNITY LEADERS in the YKHC Region

Each year the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) holds an Annual Tribal Gathering where Tribal delegates come together to discuss and vote on a broad range of concerns. During the 2018 Tribal Gathering, YKHC took a slightly different approach to seeking input from community representatives on important health care issues vital to realizing their vision of becoming the “healthiest people.” On the second day of the gathering, Tribal delegates were asked, “How can YKHC work with your tribe to meet these healthy people goals?” This question stimulated dozens of community-driven ideas on how their communities can help, including improve children’s oral health, reduce drowning and unintentional injuries, and prevent suicide.

After the suggestions were reviewed and summarized by YKHC’s Leadership and Board, intervention strategies were identified for development and implementation. Among the strategies, the Indian Health Service’s “Introduction to Injury Prevention” course was identified as a collective resource to empower community self-determination to develop and implement culturally-relevant injury prevention programs.

In November 2018, participants from the surrounding Yukon-Kuskokwim communities, Anchorage, Fairbanks and Kotzebue attended the Injury Prevention course. The course offered to support community leaders and provide them with resources to address public health issues in their home communities.

Instructors included YKHC's Injury Control and Emergency Medical Service Manager, Injury Prevention staff from ANTHC, and the Indian Health Services Liaison to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Students became engaged in the public health model and learned the need for proper data collection and how to use the tools provided to improve their community’s well-being.

The course provided information on identifying target populations, choosing appropriate intervention strategies, and evaluating those strategies’ strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness. Students collected field data on helmet usage among ATV and snowmachine riders. This exercise initiated conversations about how to identify potential solutions to improve motor vehicle safety. The training culminated in presentations and a request for funds to support injury prevention projects.

Work has now begun on coordinating local projects led by grassroots efforts to improve health and safety. A second similar training at YKHC for regional community members was provided in August, 2019.