Developing an Integrated Program Design for SNAP-Ed Programming and Evaluation

Laurel Jacobs, DrPH, MPH; Theresa LeGros, MA; Lauren McCullough, MPH; Vanessa Farrell PhD, RD; Scottie Misner PhD, RD

Background

Evidence suggests that **direct education** (DE), coupled with **policy, systems, and environment approaches** (PSEs) and aligned with the **Socio-Ecological Model** (SEM), increase the likelihood that communities will adopt and sustain healthy eating and active living behaviors to prevent obesity.

The SEM (Figure 1) recognizes the relationship between individuals and their environment, and that the most effective approaches supporting healthy behaviors are a combination of efforts at many levels--individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and public policy.

Figure 1. The Socio-Ecological Model[1]

As Arizona's largest SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education) implementing agency, the **University of Arizona Nutrition Network** (UANN) conducts and evaluates healthy eating and active living DE and PSE outreach in nine counties. The program operates in rural and urban areas and reaches individuals, families, and communities across the lifespan.

Objective

The UANN sought to integrate the SEM, relevant behavior change theory and best practices in the field across planning, implementation, and evaluation stages to support localized obesity prevention programming designed as a unified statewide program (Figure 2).
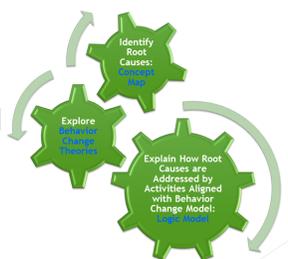
Figure 2. The UANN's Program Design Objectives

Methods

1. The UANN brought together program stakeholders from diverse SNAP-Ed units operating in nine counties.

2. The group identified possible root causes of obesity related to the UANN's target population: SNAP participants and eligibles in Arizona (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The UANN Root Cause Map

Root causes align with the SEM
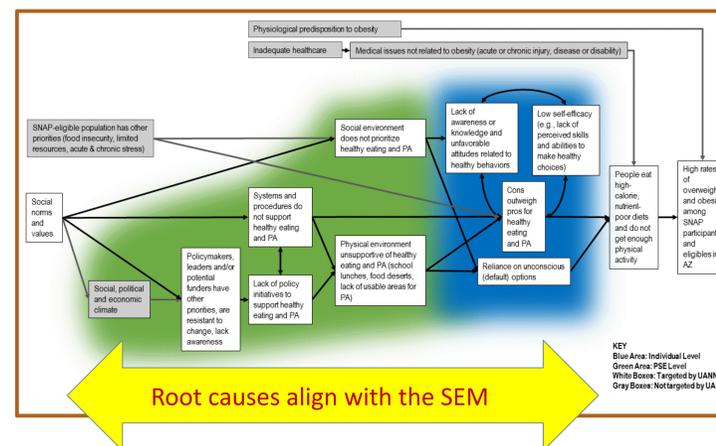
3. Identify a behavior change theory that supports the UANN's primary goal of obesity prevention.

The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) predicts behavior change in stages, which include pre-contemplation, contemplation, determination, action, relapse, and maintenance (Figure 4).[2]

The UANN adopted the TTM based on its alignment with the program's individual level educational outreach. The TTM can also apply to PSE efforts at other levels of the SEM, such as identifying the stage of change within organizations or communities.

Figure 4. The Transtheoretical Model[3]

Results

The UANN developed an integrated program design that addresses comprehensive public health approaches in alignment with the TTM as its foundational theory of behavior change and the SEM.

A unified UANN program logic model (figure 5) aligns with the TTM and the identified possible root causes.

Figure 5. The UANN Logic Model

Interventions at multiple levels of the SEM address root causes
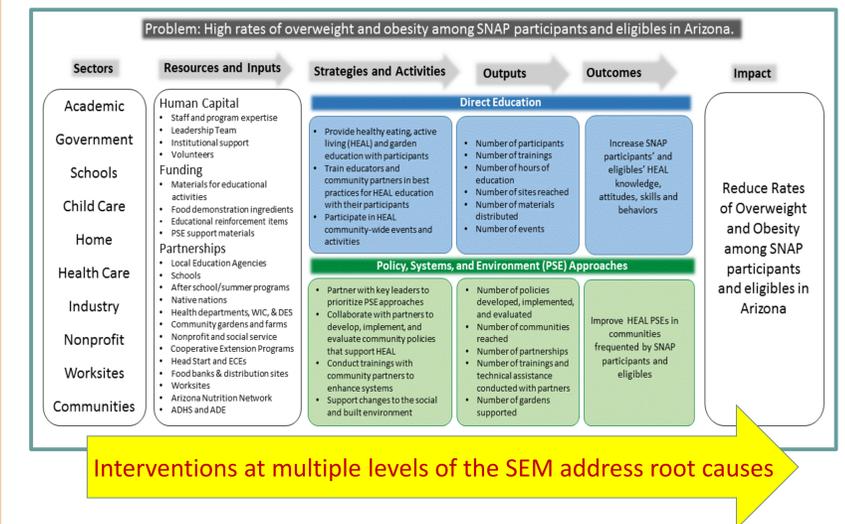
Conclusion

The UANN's process illustrates how integrated program design across DE and PSEs and coupled with the SEM and behavior change theory can strengthen SNAP-Ed program planning, implementation and evaluation.

An integrated program design may increase the likelihood that the obesity prevention efforts such as the UANN's SNAP-Ed program will achieve behavior and policy changes, and effectively capture these changes through program evaluation.