

Implementing Injury Prevention Strategies at the Community Level

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Assign Responsibility for Injury Control

- Without someone assigned the responsibility and authority for monitoring injuries, developing prevention strategies, and coordinating prevention efforts it is unrealistic to expect any progress.
Note: Typically I look to the state and local Health Departments to provide this type of leadership because they are responsible for the health and welfare of their citizens, have access to the data needed, and have the experience and authority necessary to address public health problems.
- You will not be able to do this alone and will need to link with others.
- Injury prevention activities currently exist in most communities, i.e., police and fire department efforts, trauma systems, child death review teams, seat belt and motorcycle helmet legislation, public health departments, the faith community, etc, but until a critical mass of resources is pulled together and coordinated, prevention efforts will be fragmented and may have little effect.
- One person, or a small group working together, who can take a broad look at local injury problems and bring together the different players in the community to build upon each others strengths and develop coordinated injury prevention efforts can make a difference.

Apply a Systems Approach to Prevention

Remember, each step will not necessarily happen in the order described, earlier steps may modify the work done in previous steps and you will need to remain flexible throughout in order to be most effective. You also need to make an effort throughout your program to enlist organizations and to build your interventions so that your prevention efforts can be institutionalized if they are proven to be effective.

Step One: Gather and Analyze Data:

- Use your death, hospital, police, and traffic data to identify injury problems and sub-populations at risk. (Your local health department should be able to help you with this.)
Remember, the data doesn't have to be perfect, just good enough to let you know if, what, and where your injury problems are.
- Gather information about the political and social climate of the community, i.e., is the community concerned about injuries? If so, what injuries, who is concerned, and what do they point to as the underlying causes?
- Gather information on what programs and coalitions currently exist in the community that address injury prevention or related issues, i.e., Big Brothers may not consider themselves to be a violence prevention program, but they are concerned about the well-being of children and adolescents and may be serving a population that is at high risk of violence.

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Step Two: Select Priority Injuries and Populations

- Determine the injury and population you will focus on based on your injury data, availability of an effective intervention strategy, and community interest in addressing the problem.
- Selecting injury priorities and focus populations will help you to define preventive measures, identify resources and potential intervention partners, and clarify objectives for evaluation.
- Be as specific as possible when identifying your injury priorities and focus populations. The more precisely you define the injury and population, the better your chance of intervening effectively, i.e., “poisoning among children” vs. “iron poisoning from prenatal vitamins among children ages birth to 4 years old.”

Step Three: Determine Intervention Strategies

- Gather local data on the injury problem(s) identified to determine the typical scenerios in which the chosen injury occurs, i.e. Hot water scalds among children under 4, are they occurring in the bathroom when taking a bath? In the kitchen when the caregiver is cooking? Or when a caregiver is drinking hot liquids and holding a child? Each scenario calls for a different prevention strategy. What you are looking for is the who, what, where, when, and how your priority injury occurs. *Note: This data will also prove invaluable for gathering support for the prevention strategies chosen.*
- Typically, injury problems are most effectively addressed using a multi-faceted approach. Utilize *Haddon's Matrix*¹ and the *Spectrum of Prevention*² to generate potential strategies including a combination of technology, regulation, education, and enforcement. Also look at multiple levels of intervention including, the individual, community, organizational change, social norms, and policy/legislation.
- Pick a prevention strategy that has been proven effective and is easy to implement for your first effort. It is more important that your first effort is successful than that it is big or comprehensive. With a success under your belt, it will be much easier to obtain resources, support, and enthusiasm for a more difficult or long-term effort.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Be sure to use what is already out there in terms of prevention materials and the experiences of others who have already tried something similar. While you may need to “tweak” what you find to meet local needs, or to be culturally appropriate, your effort will be stronger because it builds on the experiences of others and may be cheaper if you can skip much of the development work. Look to your local resources, your state and local health department, existing Safe Kids Coalitions, the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control, the Injury Prevention Research Centers, your local NHTSA representative, Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the Children's Safety Network for assistance in identifying resources.

¹ Runyan CW. Using the Haddon matrix: introducing the third dimension. *Injury Prevention* 1998;4:302-307. Available at <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/4/4/302>

² Cohen L, Swift S. The spectrum of prevention: developing a comprehensive approach to injury prevention. *Injury Prevention* 1999;5:203-207. Available at <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/5/3/203>

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Step Four: Develop an Implementation Plan

- An implementation plan defines what you want to do and how you are going to achieve it. Bottom line, if you can't describe what you will do, it won't be done and will be impossible to evaluate.
- An Implementation Plan is invaluable in focusing and guiding your efforts, gathering resources, and setting the stage for evaluating your efforts. Although you may be able to draft a rough outline to help you identify potential partners, the full Implementation Plan should be developed in conjunction with your implementation partners.
- Your Implementation Plan should include:
 - A Goal that states what you ultimately want to achieve. The goal will probably be something broad enough for everyone to agree on and may serve as your rallying cry to solicit involvement in your prevention effort.
 - Objectives that set forth the steps you will take to achieve your goal. These should be as specific as possible describing what will be done and by when.
 - Activities that describe who will do what by when so that the objective will be achieved. Activities should also include evaluation measures so that you can track what you have done and identify problems and successes along the way. *Note: development of the plan is an iterative process. You will probably not be able to fully detail your activities until you bring your partners on board.*
 - Evaluation measures that will allow you to track what you are doing, document what the prevention activities cost, assess if you are successfully doing what you set out to do, and make any adjustments needed to increase the effectiveness of your prevention efforts. *Note: thinking about evaluation at this point in time will help you to refine your program objectives and thus strengthen your program before you begin implementation.*
 - An assessment of the specific resources needed to implement the Plan including staff time, materials, travel, etc. Which resources are available through the participating implementation partners, what specific resources you will need to ask for, and who you will ask. *Note: You may need to revise your Implementation Plan based on the resources available.*
 - An overall timeline with benchmarks to help keep all partners on track and allow for celebrating successes along the way.

Step Five: Identify, Select and Commit Community Agencies to Implement and Support the Plan

- Based on the Goals and Objectives of your Implementation Plan, identify intervention partners. Choose partners who:
 - Are credible, have a parallel mission, and have the organizational structure that facilitates incorporation of the Implementation Plan.
 - Have an interest in injury prevention, are working with or members of your focus population, are active in the community, have the potential for addressing injury prevention, hold power in the community and/or are respected by the focus population.

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- Look for agencies/individuals that can incorporate the implementation activities into their on-going functions/operations. Institutionalization of your intervention strategies will ensure their continuation over time should they prove to be effective.
- Look at what you can do within your own organization, i.e., educating your employees, requiring all employees to “buckle up” when on company business, purchasing cars with specific safety features as company vehicles, etc. *Remember, the more you are able to do within your own organization the greater credibility you will have when trying to convince others to join you in your prevention efforts.*
- Establish a task force/coalition/board to help you implement the Implementation Plan. Choose people who have the time to work with the program and include technical experts and community leaders. Use the group to identify potential barriers and how to address them, fine tune your goals and objectives, develop your implementation activities, identify and solicit resources to carry out your interventions, and solve problems as you carry out your Implementation Plan.
 - Explore existing coalitions and task forces in the community you will be working in. It may make more sense to join an existing task force or coalition as a new project that fits under their overall mission or as a sub-committee under the larger organization.
 - Orient all members so that the group starts with a common definition of key issues and an understanding of the goal of the group. Orient new members separately as needed so that everyone has a common framework to build on.
 - It takes time to build trust and for individual members to understand the discipline specific language used by other members and their agenda/point of view based on their organization and background. If you have the group begin by identifying opportunities, available resources, and others who should be at the table, you will provide them with an initial focus. Working together on an easy first project will also build their sense of success and investment in the group.
 - Sometimes it may be useful to bring together a group that deals with a broader range of issues than your initial priority injuries, i.e., to develop a childhood injury prevention coalition to look at all childhood injuries even though your initial prevention focus will be on deaths and injuries to young children due to household fires.

Step Six: Develop Protocols and Materials

- Work with your partners to develop protocols and materials needed to carry out your Implementation Plan.
- Protocols should clearly state roles, responsibilities, and activities of each agency/person implementing the plan.
- Remember not to reinvent the wheel and use or adapt materials and protocols developed by similar efforts.
- Instructional materials need to contain simple, targeted messages and should be simple to read and easy to reproduce. This is as true for materials designed to educate adolescents as materials designed to educate legislators or manufacturers.
- It is not enough to introduce a problem, instructional material should clearly state what action should be taken. This is true for parent/professional education, attempts to pass legislation, enhance enforcement, and/or develop new protective technology or standards.

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Step Seven: Orient and Train Agencies/Individuals Implementing the Intervention Plan

- Review protocols and materials with those who will be implementing your intervention. Be sure to give specific hints on how to implement the program, listen to comments, and revise per suggestions received.

Step Eight: Monitor and Support Implementation of the Plan

- Meet frequently and regularly with the agencies and persons implementing the Intervention Plan. Give feedback on the status of the interventions, solicit feedback from your implementation partners, and make changes as needed to build on what is working, and change approaches as needed to address barriers, hold advisory meetings, and provide technical assistance when needed.
- Deal with problems as they occur.
- Remain flexible and able to adjust your prevention efforts as things change in the community and your prevention efforts create unanticipated spin-offs or consequences.
- Recognize and publicize the contributions of persons and agencies implementing the Plan. Make them well known, even famous.

Step Nine: Evaluate and Revise

- Evaluation data can be used to convince funding sources and the community of the value of your program and is invaluable for tweaking your program to increase its effectiveness.
- Determine your evaluation design before you start your program. That way you will be able to integrate your data collection into your implementation activities. Ask an epidemiologist from the health department or a research consultant from a University if you need help.
- Evaluation must be integral to the program. The data don't have to be complex or difficult to collect, but must be usable for assessing the program's effectiveness.
- You want to be able to answer the following questions:
 - What is the program designed to do?
 - Are we doing it?
 - Is it making a difference?
- You will also need the ability to report to funding agencies and stakeholders who are interested in injury prevention:
 - The results of your program
 - How the results were reached
 - Any lessons you have learned along the way
 - The cost of your intervention vs. the benefit of the program

Step Ten: Disseminate Lessons Learned

- Share the results and lessons learned from your program with others so that the field continues to grow and others can profit from your successes.
- Be sure to share the results with your focus community, prevention partners, community political structure, and others striving to prevent injuries.