Making Family Health History A Tradition For The Senior Population In Utah

Authors: Rebecca Giles, MPH, CHES, Jenny Johnson, CHES, Amanda Sorensen, BS, Michelle Endo, BS, and Dee Dee Lobato, BS

**Background**

In 2004, the U.S. Surgeon General launched a Family History Initiative and encouraged Americans to collect their family health history. Building upon this national initiative, the Utah Department of Health customized the initiative to reach seniors. Utah seniors represent an untapped resource and have shown a growing interest in family health history. Genealogy was incorporated into the project, as Utah is home to the world’s largest genealogical library.

**Project**

The project was implemented in November 2005 and again in the spring of 2007. The target audience was seniors, ages 60 years and older, attending Salt Lake County senior centers. A booklet called the “Family Health History Toolkit” was developed to help Utahns learn about their family health history. This booklet was adapted for seniors in 2007. Feedback from 26 classes taught in November 2005 and four focus groups conducted in 2007 were used to revise the toolkit. The new senior-friendly toolkits were distributed via classes taught in senior centers.

**Goal**

To increase awareness of the importance of family health history among Utah seniors.

**Key Message**

Make family health history a tradition in three easy steps:

- Talk about it
- Write it down
- Share it

**Partners**

- Salt Lake County Aging Services
- Senior Centers
- Genealogists
- LDS Family History Library
- Genetic counselors

**Results**

- Approximately 650 seniors attended 31 in-person classes to learn about their family health history
- More than 780 senior-friendly toolkits distributed to date
- A four-question survey was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the project’s key messages. Results showed:

  - Percentage of seniors who said they would collect their family health history:
    - No: 9.5%
    - Possibly: 12.4%
    - Yes: 78.1%

  - Percentage of seniors who said the materials were useful:
    - Not Useful: 3.9%
    - Useless: 96.1%
    - Useful: 10.3%
    - Very Useful: 84.2%

  - Percentage of seniors who said they would share their family health history with their family and/or doctor:
    - No: 12.4%
    - Possibly: 78.1%
    - Yes: 9.5%