

# Connecting and Coaching for Healthy Communities in Rural Cambria County, Pennsylvania

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**A 1705 NACDD Success Story**



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CHRONIC DISEASE DIRECTORS**

Promoting Health. Preventing Disease.



## SUMMARY:

In 2019, rural Cambria County ranked 65<sup>th</sup> out of 67 Pennsylvania counties for health outcomes. Residents experience higher rates of lifestyle habits that increase their likelihood of becoming obese and developing diabetes. A partnership between the Health Promotion Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania and the Conemaugh Health System has connected with and coached hundreds of at-risk residents through the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP). Conemaugh has achieved CDC Full Recognition and CMS Medicare DPP Supplier status to sustain the availability of the evidence-based program, which can help prevent the onset of diabetes.

## CHALLENGE:

Conemaugh Health System, of Duke LifePoint Healthcare, is the largest healthcare provider in west-central Pennsylvania. Residents of Cambria County benefit from the Conemaugh mission of making communities healthier through initiatives that innovate care delivery and achieve the Triple Aim. Unfortunately, many residents experience higher rates of type 2 diabetes due to risk factors that are prevalent in rural communities. They have high obesity rates due to physical inactivity and poor diet. Residents report significant barriers to accessing healthcare services and health education. These barriers include physician/provider shortages, low health literacy, low incomes, and limited access to transportation. These complex challenges create opportunities for innovative and collaborative partnerships.

## SOLUTION:

Conemaugh implemented successful strategies, in partnership with the Health Promotion Council, to address challenges the surrounding rural community faces in accessing healthcare services and health education. The interdisciplinary project team developed data-driven strategies that targeted healthcare providers and the population at-risk for diabetes. Marketing campaigns in print, digital, and live-events outlets created strong consumer enrollment and retention. Conemaugh capitalized on its electronic medical record platform to issue best practice alerts to healthcare providers of at-risk patients and provided a seamless, one-click referral process. Additionally, virtual National DPP delivery increased enrollment in National DPP.

**“Completing this program has given me the tools I needed to take charge of my health. As a result, I am no longer obese, and I am no longer pre-diabetic. Thank you, and keep up the good work as you continue to provide this service to the community. We are fortunate to have this program in Johnstown!” -Janet, Conemaugh Program Participant**

## RESULTS:

The Health Promotion Council’s expertise, experience, and resources supported Conemaugh’s ability to build capacity to deliver the National Diabetes Prevention Program. To date, 207 at-risk residents have enrolled in the face-to-face program, and 270 at-risk residents have enrolled in the virtual program. Program fidelity has ensured high participant retention and outcomes. Coverage for residents



through Medicare Diabetes Prevention Program (MDPP), and for employees as part of their Vitality points within their health and wellness plans, has been essential for planning the sustainability of the critically needed program in our rural area.

**YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY:**

The strength of connections across interdisciplinary teams creates the strongest and highest quality coaching environment for National DPP participants. Lasting impacts of the collaborative model between the Health Promotion Council and Conemaugh include: increasing awareness among clinicians and consumers; creating peer-and-clinician activated referral systems; and, supporting coverage channels to embed the prevention service. Moreover, this model is being replicated successfully in other rural communities of Pennsylvania.

**SUSTAINING SUCCESS:**

Program sustainability continues to be the goal of our collaborative efforts. These efforts will require continuing progress within the areas of awareness, availability, referral, and coverage. Conemaugh is committed to exploring opportunities to contract with payors to embed the National DPP as a routine part of services. To increase enrollment, there are plans to include one-word text enrollment and participant engagement. To increase recruitment, there are plans underway for connecting with regional population health initiatives that will support program referrals and visibility. The leadership at Conemaugh grows new connections and coaching supports that uphold the mission of making communities healthier.