Partnership in Action

POOLING FUNDS TO FORM A RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE LEARNING COMMUNITY IN THE MIDWEST

Like their counterparts directing CDC-funded Rape Prevention Education (RPE) programs in state and territorial health departments across the country, directors of RPE programs in Health and Human Services Regions 7 and 8 have been thinking about how best to shift their work toward more comprehensive sexual violence prevention programming. Moving beyond program strategies directed solely at individuals, they are seeking ways to intervene more effectively at higher levels of the socio-ecological model, using a shared risk and protective factor approach.

To help move strategically, they asked: What can current research offer as guidance to practitioners? What strategies seem most promising in addressing risk and protective factors for sexual violence? Which specific strategies might be poised for testing and evaluation?

To explore these questions with both researchers and practitioners in the room together, RPE directors from regions 7 and 8 — the upper midwest and mountain states — have pooled funding from each of their CDC grants to create a research-to-practice learning collaborative. The group, dubbed the Cross-State Initiative (CSI), has convened four meetings so far, meeting in person twice a year (usually in conjunction with annual grantee meetings or other national conferences). They also frequently confer by phone and webinar and, sparked by these robust meetings and calls, share and explore ideas via e-mail and Google Drive.

The first CSI meeting was held in January 2015. Nine researchers were invited to share insights from their own research, suggest strategies particularly relevant to broader levels of the socio-ecological model, and identify research and interventions from other fields that might apply to sexual violence prevention. The meeting was designed to foster exchange and conversation; the group was kept relatively small, and the format built in plenty of time for conversation and networking, which helped to bridge research to practice. Topics included the relationships between bullying, sexual harassment, pornography, and sexual violence; insights from other fields (particularly alcohol and drug prevention and STD/HIV prevention); and the role of social norms.

Subsequent meetings followed a similar format, with further exploration of shared risk and protective factors, as well as more detailed consideration of potential evaluation measures. At its most recent meeting in August 2016, members of this unique learning collaborative agreed to continue a focus on collaborative learning opportunities, shared work across members, and continued exploration of opportunities to partner and collaborate across states.

Keys to success for the CSI include:

- each RPE program’s willingness to contribute financially and to participate in meeting planning and logistics;
- Safe States Alliance’s willingness to serve as fiscal agent for the pooled funds;
- CDC’s participation among the researchers as well as supporting this use of funds; and
- the safe environment for questioning and learning created by the researchers and practitioners together.

CSI members feel they need not wait for additional research and interventions relevant to the higher levels of the socio-ecological model — there’s plenty to work with already, from both the violence prevention field and others. With future calls and meetings in the works, a logic model, and an evaluation plan in place, they are poised to become implementers and testers of interventions across states, contributing to the ongoing flow of research to practice for the entire field.