

WHAT IS HEALTH EDUCATION?

- Health education is a social science that draws from the biological, environmental, psychological, physical and medical sciences to promote health and prevent disease, disability and premature death through education-driven voluntary behavior change activities.
- Health education is the development of individual, group, institutional, community and systemic strategies to improve health knowledge, attitudes, skills and behavior.
- The purpose of health education is to positively influence the health behavior of individuals and communities as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health.

WHY IS HEALTH EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

- Health education improves the health status of individuals, families, communities, states, and the nation.
- Health education enhances the quality of life for all people.
- Health education reduces premature deaths.
- By focusing on prevention, health education reduces the costs (both financial and human) that individuals, employers, families, insurance companies, medical facilities, communities, the state and the nation would spend on medical treatment.

WHO PROVIDES HEALTH EDUCATION?

- Some people specialize in health education (trained and/or certified health education specialists). Others perform selected health education functions as part of what they consider their primary responsibility (medical treatment, nursing, social work, physical therapy, oral hygiene, etc.). Lay workers learn on the job to do specific, limited educational tasks to encourage healthy behavior.
- Para-professionals and health professionals from other disciplines are not familiar with the specialized body of health education knowledge, skills, theories, and research, nor is it their primary interest or professional development focus. This will limit their effectiveness with clients and communities, and their cost-effectiveness.
- Health education requires intensive specialized study. Over 250 colleges and universities in the US offer undergraduate and graduate (Masters and Doctorate) degrees in school or community health education, health promotion and other related titles.
- Nationally, voluntary credentialing as a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) is available from the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc (NCHEC).
- CHES competencies (health education needs assessment; program planning, implementation and evaluation; service coordination; and Health Education needs, concerns, resource communication) are generic to the practice of health education, whether it takes place in schools, colleges, workplaces, medical care settings, public health settings or other educational settings of the community. CHES are re-certified every five years based on documentation of participation in 75 hours of approved continuing education activities.

WHERE ARE HEALTH EDUCATORS EMPLOYED?

- In **schools** health educators teach health as a subject and promote and implement Coordinated School Health Programs, including health services, student, staff and parent health education, and promote healthy school environments and school-community partnerships. At the school district level they develop education methods and materials; coordinate, promote, and evaluate programs; and write funding proposals.
- Working on a **college/university campus**, health educators are part of a team working to create an environment in which students feel empowered to make healthy choices and create a caring community. They identify needs; advocate and do community organizing; teach whole courses or individual classes; develop mass media campaigns; and train peer educators, counselors, and/or advocates. They address issues related to disease prevention; consumer, environmental, emotional, sexual health; first aid, safety and disaster preparedness; substance abuse prevention; human growth and development; and nutrition and eating issues. They may manage grants and conduct research.
- In **companies**, health educators perform or coordinate employee counseling as well as education services, employee health risk appraisals, and health screenings. They design, promote, lead and/or evaluate programs about weight control, hypertension, nutrition, substance abuse prevention, physical fitness, stress management and smoking cessation; develop educational materials; and write grants for money to support these projects. They help companies meet occupational health and safety regulations, work with the media, and identify community health resources for employees.
- In **health care settings** health educators educate patients about medical procedures, operations, services and therapeutic regimens, create activities and incentives to encourage use of services by high risk patients; conduct staff training and consult with other health care providers about behavioral, cultural or social barriers to health; promote self-care; develop activities to improve patient participation on clinical processes; educate individuals to protect, promote or maintain their health and reduce risky behaviors; make appropriate community-based referrals, and write grants.
- In **community organizations** and **government agencies** health educators help a community identify its needs, draw upon its problem-solving abilities and mobilize its resources to develop, promote, implement and evaluate strategies to improve its own health status. Health educators do community organizing and outreach, grantwriting, coalition building, advocacy and develop, produce, and evaluate mass media health campaigns.

WHAT DOES A TRAINED HEALTH EDUCATOR DO?

- ✓ Assess individual and community needs
- ✓ Plan health education programs
- ✓ Develop health education programs

- ✓ Coordinate health education programs
- ✓ Implement health education programs
- ✓ Manage health education programs & personnel
- ✓ Evaluate health education programs
- ✓ Write grants
- ✓ Build coalitions
- ✓ Identify resources
- ✓ Make referrals
- ✓ Develop social marketing and mass media campaigns
- ✓ Organize/ mobilize communities for action
- ✓ Handle controversial health issues/content
- ✓ Advocate for health related issues
- ✓ Encourage healthy behavior
- ✓ Use a variety of education/training methods
- ✓ Develop audio, visual, print and electronic materials
- ✓ Conduct research
- ✓ Write scholarly articles

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT HEALTH EDUCATION?

Contact a local university or one of the member organizations of the Coalition of National Health Education Organizations to learn more about health education.

American Association for Health Education

1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191

800-213-7193

<http://www.aahperd.org/aahe>

American College Health Association

PO Box 28937
Baltimore, MD 21240
410-859-1500
<http://www.acha.org>

American School Health Association

7263 State Route 43
PO Box 708
Kent, OH 44240
330-678-1601
<http://www.ashaweb.org>

Association of State and Territorial Directors of Health Promotion and Public Health Education

750 First Street, NE, Suite 1050
Washington, DC 20002
202-289-6636
<http://www.astdhppe.org/>

Eta Sigma Gamma

The National Professional Health Education Honorary
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306
765-285-2258
<http://www.etasigmagamma.org>

**Public Health Education and Health Promotion Section
School Health Education and Services Section
American Public Health Association**

800 "I" Street, NW
Washington, DC 20002
202-777-APHA (2742)
<http://www.apha.org>

Society for Public Health Education

750 First Street, NE, Suite 910
Washington, DC 20002
202-408-9804
<http://www.sophe.org>

Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation

1900 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1599
703-476-3402