**Adapted from:**

Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE)

National Health Education Week Toolkit

What Is Health Education?

Health education draws from the biological, environmental, psychological, physical, and medical sciences. It aims to promote health and prevent disease, injury, disability, and premature death through theory-based interventions that: promote voluntary individual behavior change; or policy, system and environmental change activities, programs, campaigns, and research to help make the healthy choice the easy choice. Health education is an essential health service that involves the practice of four core activities: 1) assessment, 2) planning; 3) implementation; and 4) evaluation. By focusing on prevention, health education aims to reduce the financial and human costs that individuals, employers, health facilities, insurance companies, and the nation would spend on healthcare and medical treatment.

In practice, health education adopts a broad, ecological approach in an effort to create healthy communities. Health Education Specialists work at the individual, group, institutional, community, and systemic levels to improve health knowledge, attitudes, and skills for the purpose of changing or encouraging behaviors that result in optimal health status. The field provides a scientific backdrop that has established strong theories for disease prevention and health enhancing behaviors.

## The Role of a Health Education Specialist

Health education specialists work with health care providers, policy makers, human resource personnel, and many other professionals to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent and manage disease by empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health. They accomplish this goal by:

* Assessing the needs of people and communities they serve
* Acting as a resource to help find health services or health information
* Developing programs and events to teach people about the health topics
* Implementing strategies to improve the health of individuals and communities;
* Collecting and analyzing data to learn about their audience and improve programs and services
* Evaluating the effectiveness of programs and educational materials
* Supervising staff who implement health education programs
* Advocating for improved health resources and policies that promote health

The result of health education specialists’ work improves the health status and quality of life of individuals and communities as well as reducing costly premature deaths and disability. For more information, visit: (<http://www.sophe.org/Health-Ed-Specialist-Feb2014.pdf>)

## Why Are Health Education Specialists Vital to the Nation?

Health education improves the health status of individuals, communities, states, and the nation; enhances the quality of life for all people; and reduces costly premature deaths and disability. By focusing on prevention, health education reduces the costs (both financial and human) spent on medical treatment. Chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, consume more than 75% of the $2.2 trillion spent on health care in the United States each year – the equivalent of about 2.5 economic “bailout” packages (CDC, 2013). Spending as little as $10 per person on proven preventive interventions could save the country over $16 billion in just five years (RWJF, 2008). Addressing a single risk factor (e.g., smoking) influences outcomes across multiple diseases, from preterm birth to lung disease and cancer. Addressing obesity in today's children alters the prevalence of many diseases (e.g. heart disease, cancer, diabetes, arthritis) that may be encountered decades later (Pfizer, 2013). Health education specialists offer knowledge, skills, and training that complement those of health providers, policy makers, educational experts, human resource personnel and many other professionals whose work impacts human health. Health literacy is a large determinate of health status and without these components offered by health education specialists, members in each community can be greatly affected.

## What Is Health Literacy?

Health literacy is the ability to access, understand, and act on health information. Education, language, culture, access to resources, and age are all factors that affect a person's health literacy skills. Health literacy related tasks include:

* Understanding nutrition labels
* Filling out insurance forms
* Taking medication correctly
* Communicating with health care providers
* Knowing when and where to seek care

## What Is Health Numeracy?

We define health numeracy as the individual-level skills needed to understand and use quantitative health information, including basic computation skills, ability to use information in documents and nontext formats such as graphs, and ability to communicate orally. Health literacy includes numeracy skills. Calculating blood sugar levels, measuring medications, and understanding nutrition labels all require math skills. It is also important to have basic computation skills when choosing between health plans or comparing prescription drug coverage requires calculating premiums, copays, and deductibles.

## Why Are Health Literacy and Health Numeracy Important?

Low health literacy and health numeracy is common. Low health literacy affects more adult Americans than those with diabetes, obesity, HIV/AIDS, and breast cancer combined (Pfizer, 2013) Nearly 9 out of 10 adults have difficulty using the everyday health information that is routinely available in our healthcare facilities, retail outlets, media and communities(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Low health literacy and health numeracy affects some groups more than others. People most likely to experience low health literacy or numeracy are older adults, racial and ethnic minorities, those with less than a high school degree, people with low-income levels, non-native speakers of English, and people with poor health (Pfizer, 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Note: While persons of color are disproportionately affected by low health literacy, most adults with low health literacy skills in the United States are Caucasian. Low health literacy and numeracy can lead to poor health. People with limited health literacy or numeracy skills are more likely to skip important preventive services, such as mammograms, Pap smears, and flu shots (Scott TL, et al., 2002). Studies have also shown a higher rate of hospitalization and use of emergency services among patients with low literacy skills (Baker et al., 2002). Adults with low health literacy are more likely to be uninsured (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

## What Can You Do to Improve Health Literacy/Health Numeracy?

Access to health information and services is a basic human right. We are all responsible for ensuring that information about health and wellness is available and understandable to everyone. Here’s what you can do to improve health literacy in your community:

* Use plain language and clear communication strategies
* Build knowledge of health topics through community and one-on-one education
* Partner with adult educators in your community to create a health-related curriculum that builds health-related skills, such as reading food and drug labels, communicating with providers, and accessing health services
* Include health literacy improvement in your organization’s planning and evaluation activities
* Educate colleagues about limited health literacy and its consequences

# Planning Your Health Topic of the Month Activity

## Building Organizational or Community Support

Whether led by an individual or a planning committee, successful campaigns are often grounded by broader support of institutions or communities. One way to elicit such support is to recruit members and organizations that are involved in or have expressed a commitment to community health, school health, youth groups, health education, and health promotion, locally, regionally and/or nationally. Support can be fostered through advertising, networking and one-on-one interviewing. By engaging broader support for your campaign, you have the potential to:

* Gain a deeper understanding of your population’s needs and assets
* Reach greater numbers of your population of interest
* Increase credibility of your campaign
* Gain access to additional materials
* Benefit from multiple expertise and additional human resources
* Share financial costs associated with campaign materials, events, and/or activities
* Foster a collegial network within the community-at-large
* Build off past successful initiatives
* Improve opportunities for program sustainability Establishing Goals and Objectives

## Identifying and Reaching Your Population

A successful campaign is grounded in understanding where your population of interest can be reached best. Most likely, this population will be determined by the emphasis of the theme, as well as the defined objectives of your campaign. Once you have identified your priority population, gather information on the characteristics that those individuals might have in common. Such characteristics might include age, life stage, gender, attitudes or beliefs, patterns of behavior, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, origin, health literacy, and health status. The more specifically defined your population of interest, the more successfully you can focus your campaign. Other questions to consider include the following:

1. WHAT is their information need? How much do they know about health education and health education specialists?
2. WHERE can your population of interest be reached? Rather than locating a campaign at the most convenient place, consider finding places where you can reach the most number of individuals from your population of interest. By learning where a group's "hot spots" are located, you will be able to maximize the time you spend during your campaign. Locations to consider include community colleges/universities, public health departments, hospitals/clinics, or nonprofit/voluntary organizations.
3. WHEN will your population of interest be most open to the campaign? In addition to a prime location, an effective campaign also targets particular times. You might consider a weekend community fair or event, after work social, etc. Remember, not all activities may fit into a standard “9 to 5” day.

## Identifying and Utilizing Resources

Understanding and utilizing your resources is an integral component to a successful campaign. Resources include:

* Human resources (employees, volunteers, interns, etc.)
* Monetary funding (available funds, grant money, donations, etc.)
* Materials (handouts, flyers, nutrition books, etc.)
* Space (physical space as well as airtime, television time, etc.)
* Time (for planning, implementation, and evaluation)

To maximize your resources consider the following opportunities:

* Establish partnerships
* Draw on the strengths of your employees, contacts, and board of directors
* Seek out funding opportunities at the local, state, and/or national levels
* Offer volunteer and internship positions
* Gain support through appropriate marketing of your campaign
* Hold fundraisers and encourage donations
* Save paper and the need for excess materials by making two-sided handouts and posting information on the Internet
* Recruit members of your population of interest to assist in conducting training/outreach

## Selecting and Planning Activities

Once you have developed objectives for your program, you can brainstorm some strategies to achieve your objectives. When planning your specific events and activities, consider impacting your intended audience at a variety of levels:

* *Individual:* Share on social media
* *Organizational*: Provide health education materials to clinical offices, hospitals, and community Organizations
* *K-12 Schools:* Share health education materials with administration
* *Community:* Connect more with the public by sponsoring a communitywide event, such as a health fair or a workshop
* *Public Policy:* Support legislation that promotes health education by contacting your state or local representative

A crucial step to engaging your priority population is getting the message out there. Drawing attention to the work and importance of health education in the community can be done in many ways—by visiting the priority population, by word of mouth, or through written correspondence. Know how your priority population prefers to receive information: 1) through traditional media (e.g., newspapers, radio, television); 2) word of mouth through family or friends; 3) congregations; 4) local grocery store; or 5) social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Flickr). Depending on your target audience, you might write a feature article about your event for the local paper or use Facebook to increase awareness of the work you are doing and why it is important.

Getting Your Message Heard

Traditional Media Outlets

Newspapers Newspapers remain popular venues through which individuals can share facts, resources, and opinions (although there is currently a trend toward strictly online status, which reduces the diversity of readers to those with internet access). When advocating for a particular health issue, consider distributing your message in the form of feature articles, op-eds, letters to the editor, advertisements, and adding your event to a community calendar. Use multiple channels, whenever possible.

Newsletters Newsletters provide a smaller forum through which readers can learn about specific issues, events, or services being offered. If you know of clinics, associations or organizations that may have members who are part of your priority population, submit a blurb about your event or activity. They are more likely to include your write-up in a newsletter if it is well-written and ready for publication.

Television Based on figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, Americans spend over four hours watching television per day, which makes it an excellent marketing tool. If your organization has enough money to fund a television campaign or a public service announcement (PSA), this media option can be quite fruitful. If not, there are several ways that you can engage your local television stations. Many television stations include a segment during the morning or evening news that focuses on a health issue. Research who covers these segments and inform that individual of your event or activity. Keep in mind that you must make your case as to why the public will be interested in the importance of Health Education in addressing prevention, wellness, and chronic disease management.

Radio While not as popular as television, radio can also be an effective way to market a message, especially for certain population segments. Press releases can be read over the air to spread the word. Depending on your priority population, try local stations, regional stations, or even the National Public Radio.

Social Media Outlets

What Is Social Media? Social media is a term that refers to web-based and mobile technologies that allow people to interact with and engage one another. Such media includes:

* Blogs and micro-blogs, such as Twitter
* Social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn
* Video-sharing sites, such as YouTube
* Image-sharing sites, such as Instagram

The key characteristic of social media is that it’s organized around user-generated content — people sharing messages with other people. And best of all, social media sites are generally free so the cost of setting up an account is non-existent or negligible.

How Can You Use Social Media to Convey Your Message? You can use social media to communicate directly with the public. You can also use social media to communicate directly with policymakers, media and other specific audiences. Often, reporters will pick up a story based on what they hear through social media feeds. If your organization has a web site, you can place links to your social media channels on your site. (SBUMC has a point person for all social media and web content) Some points to keep in mind about using social media are:

1. It takes an investment of time to manage the sites, post new material, and monitor the conversation. Before you begin, make sure that someone on your coalition is responsible for any given social media channel and will maintain, update, and monitor its use
2. To keep your social media channels fresh and encourage people to keep coming back, you need to continually post new information. You may not have a great deal of news about your organization’s efforts on a regular basis. You may therefore wish to position your social media channel as an authoritative source of reliable health-related news and update it weekly with new stories on health topics related to your initiative.
3. Social media is defined by the presence of user-generated content. That means that people will be having a conversation with you by posting questions or comments on your Facebook page; giving your site a thumbs up or thumbs down, depending on whether or not they like it; and responding to entries on blogs or to videos with written comments. You need to invest time in monitoring these comments, listening to what people are saying to and about you, and participating in the conversation.
4. Although social media sites are generally not difficult to use, it helps to have a tech-savvy partner to back you up if you do run into technical difficulties.

For more information about social media platforms and how to use them, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/socialmedia/tools/guidelines/pdf/socialmediatoolkit_bm.pdf>

Full Document: <http://www.sophe.org/NHEW2014_toolkit_final.pdf>

How to Write a Press Release

## 1. Use an Eye-Catching Title

Come up with a title that will engage the reader. A second tag line can be used to further make your point.

## 2. Summarize Your Message in the First Paragraph

Get right to the point. The reader has a short attention span and needs to know what you are saying in the first few sentences. Give the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of the story. Include information about the health observance (monthly health topic) and your key message. Make it clear that there is a problem (injuries) and there’s a solution (best practices).

## 3. Include Facts and Quotes

Expand upon your message using facts and quotes. Include messaging about the best practices and current laws. Quotes should be personable- think about how you would give health advice in the clinic. Limit your press release to 1 page.

## Sample Press Release

(Title) STONY BROOK MEDICAL EXPERTS SAY KICK OFF SUMMER WITH A SAFE START

(Tag Line) Hospital Trauma Center prepares for the usual spike in summer injuries

(Loc/Date) STONY BROOK, NY, JULY 2, 2014 – (1st Paragraph, summarize message) For many Americans, summer means fun in the sun; kids are out of school, adults are on vacation and it's time for outdoor activities. But with all these pleasures of the season comes injuries and increased visits to the emergency department.

(More detail with facts and quotes) Trauma and injury remain a devastating problem in the US and is the leading cause of death for those under the age of 45. Almost 200,000 Americans die of injury every year and nearly all are completely avoidable. Trauma experts at Stony Brook University Hospital offer some advice on how to prevent common injuries this summer, while still having fun.

“Summertime is the worst time of the year for injury, and our trauma numbers go up,” says Jane McCormack, RN, Trauma Program Manager, Stony Brook University Hospital. “People are getting outdoors, doing high energy activities and they really need to take a moment to think about safety and take some precautionary measures. At Stony Brook, we see many injuries related to swimming, boating and biking, but a huge problem is fireworks and burns,” she says.

Burns: Nearly 10,000 Americans are injured by fireworks each year, according to the National Council of Fireworks Safety. Most of these injuries occur during the Fourth of July holiday and include serious burns, loss of fingers, and blindness.

“Each year, we treat adults and children injured by fireworks” says Steve Sandoval, MD, Director of the Suffolk County Volunteer Firefighters Burn Center at Stony Brook University Hospital. Dr. Sandoval says the safest way to enjoy the Fourth of July or any other celebration is to view public firework displays, which are handled by professionals, from a safe distance.

And fireworks aren’t the only thing that can cause summertime burns, outdoor grills, both charcoal and propane cause hundreds of injuries and thousands of fires every year.

“During the summer months, we also treat at least a few injuries from fire pits and campfires,” says Dr. Sandoval. Children must be supervised around these fires, and it is advised that you keep a bucket of sand and/or a garden hose nearby in case the fire grows. Place the fire pit away from trees, branches and foliage in order to prevent catching fire.

Be sure your BBQ is well maintained and cleaned regularly. When barbecuing, children should be far enough away to prevent a burn injury and remember to keep all barbecue accessories, including charcoal, lighter fluid, propane gas tanks well out of the reach of kids as well.

Dr. Sandoval reminds Long Islanders that flammable liquids, like lighter fluid or gasoline should never be used to start a fire. “Unfortunately, the Burn Center treats flash burns to the face and torso when these agents have been used.” Dr. Sandoval advises.

Water Safety: From a dip in the pool to a day on the beach, Long Island is the ideal place to cool off in the summer heat! But along with all the fun of swimming, body surfing or just paddling around come some real dangers — including the risk for drowning. Statistics show that drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury and death for children ages one to four, and that drowning can occur in as little as two inches of water.

“Drowning deaths can occur very quickly, even when children are left unattended for just a few minutes, and children drown without making a sound,” says Erin Zazzera, RN, Pediatric Trauma Coordinator, Stony Brook University Hospital. “When children are swimming, always designate one adult to keep a watchful eye on them without any distraction. This means no talking on the phone, or leaving the area without assigning another adult to take your place. Safeguard the pool area using several layers of protection such as door alarms, self-locking gates and pool alarms. If a child is missing, check the pool first.”

And for adults, James Vosswinkel, MD, Medical Director of the Trauma Center, Stony Brook University Hospital, says, if you’re going to hit the water, don’t mix in alcohol. “Alcohol impairs judgment and increases risk-taking, a dangerous combination for swimmers,” says Dr. Vosswinkel. “Even experienced swimmers may venture out farther than they should and not be able to make it back to shore, or they may not notice how chilled they’re getting and develop hypothermia. Even around a pool, too much alcohol can have deadly consequences. Inebriated divers may collide with the diving board, or dive where the water is too shallow.”

Boat Safety: According to the U.S. Coast Guard and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, alcohol can impair a boater’s judgment, balance, vision, and reaction time. It can also increase fatigue and susceptibility to the effects of cold-water immersion. For passengers, intoxication can lead to slips on deck, falls overboard, or accidents at the dock.

Also when boating, wear a life jacket. More than 73 percent of the people in boating accidents drowned and more than 90 percent of the people who drowned were not wearing a life jacket.

“By and large, summer accidents are avoidable, or at least the risk of serious injury can be lessened, if proper safety measures are taken,” says McCormack. “Summer is a great time to hit the great outdoors, we just need to play it safe.”

(Boiler Plate) About Stony Brook University Hospital:

Stony Brook University Hospital (SBUH) is Long Island’s premier academic medical center. With 603 beds, SBUH serves as the region’s only tertiary care center and Level 1 Trauma Center, and is home to the Stony Brook Heart Institute, Stony Brook Cancer Center, Stony Brook Long Island Children’s Hospital, Stony Brook Neurosciences Institute, and Stony Brook Digestive Disorders Institute. SBUH also encompasses Suffolk County’s only Level 4 Regional Perinatal Center, state-designated AIDS Center, state-designated Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program, state-designated Burn Center, the Christopher Pendergast ALS Center of Excellence, and Kidney Transplant Center. It is home of the nation’s first Pediatric Multiple Sclerosis Center. To learn more, visit www.stonybrookmedicine.edu.