



Institute for Community Health

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Youth suicide and overdose: The impact of a research/community partnership on community action.

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Community coalition work can be a powerful strategy for addressing emerging public health issues. A coalition's use of community-based participatory research (CBPR) can enhance community change. This presentation will focus on the partnership between a research organization and a community coalition to prevent substance abuse and suicide and the resulting impact. Somerville, Massachusetts a city of 77,478 experienced a rash of youth overdoses and suicides between 2001 and 2005 related to oxycontin and alcohol. Somerville Cares About Prevention (SCAP), a community coalition supported by the Somerville Health Department, began work with the Institute for Community Health (ICH), a local organization dedicated to improving the health of communities through community-based participatory research. Initiated by strong Mayoral leadership and heightened community interest the suicide and mental health SCAP task force began to investigate the problem and strategically plan solutions. The group used a youth risk survey, and data from emergency calls and hospital emergency room visits to map and monitor overdose and suicide activity. These collaborative surveillance efforts allowed them to continually monitor progress and informed improvement efforts. Resulting action steps included; a community-based trauma response team, improved media relationships, a suicide survivors group, engagement of schools, and prevention related training for youth workers and coaches. Suicide and overdose activity has subsided and subsequent unexpected outcomes include a youth workers network and improved youth development activities. This presentation will illustrate the potential for CBPR as a community change strategy that builds capacity and leads to community empowerment.