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# The American Stop Smoking Intervention Study for Cancer Prevention (ASSIST)

This monograph, *Evaluating ASSIST: A Blueprint for Understanding State-level Tobacco Control* (NCI Tobacco Control Monograph 17), and the preceding one in this series, Monograph 16, *ASSIST: Shaping the Future of Tobacco Prevention and Control*, are designed as companion documents. Whereas Monograph 17 addresses the evaluation framework, the details of the ASSIST evaluation, and the results of this effort, Monograph 16 focuses on the processes and interventions used to implement ASSIST, lessons learned and insights, and the transition of ASSIST from a demonstration project to the National Tobacco Control Program supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Where appropriate, reference to Monograph 16 is provided; complete citation information for Monograph 16 can be found on page ii of this volume.) Following is a brief overview of Monograph 16, which was published in May 2005.

## **Monograph 16. *ASSIST: Shaping the Future of Tobacco Prevention and Control***

ASSIST was an 8-year, nonrandomized demonstration project for tobacco use prevention and control conducted by the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, and 17 state health departments. The goal of ASSIST was to change the social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors that promote tobacco use by using policy, mass media, and program services interventions. The four policy strategies were as follows:

- Raising excise taxes to increase the price of tobacco products
- Eliminating exposure to environmental tobacco smoke
- Limiting tobacco advertising and promotion
- Reducing minors' access to tobacco products

The strategies for ASSIST were developed and implemented by state and local tobacco control coalitions using population-based research, public health practices, policy development, and media advocacy. The concepts of building on a strong evidence base; designing interventions with broad population impacts; changing social norms in pursuit of greater justice; developing strong partnerships based on common goals and mutual respect; maintaining a determination not to be swayed or pushed off target by one's adversaries; and ensuring a serious commitment to evaluation, self-reflection, and midcourse correction were crucial components of ASSIST.

Monograph 16 provides in-depth descriptions of intervention processes, examples of materials and best practices, and resource lists and guidance for activities such as media advocacy campaigns. Numerous case studies are presented, not in the form of formal social research, but as stories and vignettes from state and local public health staff

and volunteers who describe their efforts, the barriers they encountered, the lessons they learned, and insights they gained. These case studies show ASSIST as it was experienced by the many committed and diverse people responsible for its success.

Below are the major topics addressed in Monograph 16:

- The historical context and conceptual framework of ASSIST
- The national partners and state agencies and their respective roles, and communication linkages among all the structural units that promoted collaborative decision making and were essential for the program to function
- National, state, and local capacity building by mobilizing communities, establishing coalitions, promoting participatory planning, and providing training and technical assistance
- Descriptions of strategies and intervention methods, insights, and lessons learned for the three ASSIST intervention channels—policy development, mass media and media advocacy, and program services
- The tobacco industry challenge to ASSIST and the ASSIST response
- Strategic planning for a national tobacco use prevention and control program
- The processes and challenges in maintaining capacity built by the ASSIST demonstration project, disseminating best practices, and building a comprehensive national tobacco use prevention and control program
- Contributions of ASSIST to tobacco use prevention and control and to other behavioral health programs

The insights and lessons learned from ASSIST have advanced our understanding of how research studies can be successfully translated and disseminated as demonstration projects, while illustrating how sustained funding builds effective tobacco use prevention and control programs. The ASSIST legacy endures in the infrastructure that continues to support tobacco use prevention and control interventions. As the first major public health intervention grounded in ecological theory, ASSIST remains an exemplar for modern systems-level public health programs.