

Community Outreach and Engagement The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Catchment Area

The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center serves the entire state of Texas as its primary catchment area. The focus for this supplement is the predominantly African American and Hispanic community of Acres Homes, a city of Houston-designated **Super Neighborhood**, in northwest Houston, with just over 57,000 residents.

Public Health Focus

Be Well Communities™ is MD Anderson's place-based strategy for cancer prevention and control, supporting our community outreach and engagement activities by working with communities to promote wellness and address modifiable risk factors for cancer. Built on nearly 100 years of healthy community initiative best practices, literature, and experience, Be Well Communities is a core program of MD Anderson's Cancer Prevention & Control Platform. We unite individuals, schools, workplaces, government agencies, health care providers, and policymakers to plan and carry out sustainable, community-led solutions that will make positive, long-lasting changes in people's lives. We support community-based organizations to deploy evidence-based interventions to increase appropriate health behaviors and activities that can have a direct impact on cancer risk reduction in five target areas: healthy eating, active living, sun safety, tobacco-free living, and preventive care (i.e., cancer screening and vaccines).



At a Glance

Be Well™ Acres Homes is an initiative of MD Anderson in collaboration with Harris Health System, Memorial Hermann Community Benefit Corporation, UTHealth School of Public Health, and more than 30 community organizations united together with residents of Acres Homes. This supplement supported the development of a community action plan (CAP) created in collaboration with a steering committee that includes residents, non-profit organizations, health care partners, city and county agencies, and other key stakeholders. By convening this committee, we were able to identify the primary needs of the community, create a network of integrated partners, and develop an actionable plan that will be implemented by organizations in the community. In the first year of implementation, 20 projects will focus on increasing opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating, including safe routes to schools, healthy food programs in food pantries, fitness programs, and community gardens.

Additionally, we developed a resource that serves as a primer to support organizations—especially those who do not focus primarily on health—with selecting evidence-based cancer prevention and chronic disease interventions that can be implemented at the community level.

The Approach

Cancer prevention is a cornerstone of MD Anderson's mission to eliminate cancer. MD Anderson's Cancer Prevention & Control Platform is a community impact accelerator that strives to achieve accelerated, measurable, and sustainable reductions in the cancer burden with a specific focus on eliminating health disparities through new knowledge and evidence-based interventions that promote health and reduce the burden of cancer and related chronic diseases as well as addressing the social and behavioral drivers of health outcomes. Be Well Communities, a core program of the Cancer Prevention & Control Platform, is MD Anderson's place-based strategy for cancer prevention and control, carrying out community outreach and engagement activities by bringing individuals and organizations together to promote wellness and address modifiable risk factors for cancer.

Be Well Communities is built on 100 years of healthy community initiative best practices, literature, and experience. The model centers on working with community-based organizations to build their capacity to deliver and evaluate evidence-based interventions. Together with strong community partners, Be Well Communities is already making tangible differences in communities across the Greater Houston Area. More than 50 local, regional, and state organizations are actively engaged on Be Well Communities steering committees, guiding the implementation of each action plan in partnership with residents in each community. Since 2017, partnerships with the communities of Baytown and

Pasadena have included these key milestones: (1) building the capacity of community partners to increase access to healthy eating—more than 4 million pounds of healthy food have been distributed to families; (2) investing in the built environment and integrating active living into communities—27 sunshades have been installed at city parks, schools, and college campuses, six walking trails have been built, and seven crosswalks have been installed; (3) enabling actions to prevent cancer and other chronic diseases—more than 8,500 college students, staff, and faculty have access to tobacco-free education and resources; 70,000+ students have participated in school-based health and physical activity programs; nine free vaccination clinics have been hosted to provide all recommended shots to adolescents, including the HPV vaccine. Further, a recent study published in *Cancer Causes & Control* demonstrated that Be Well Communities provides an effective framework to implement and measure population-based public health approaches.

The Be Well Communities model includes phases of community assessment, planning, and implementation supported by evaluation and sustainability planning throughout. An evaluation plan, developed in partnership with RTI International, guides this work overall to ensure adequate data collection, align organizational objectives with outcomes, and assess progress and impact. Following the principles outlined in the CDC's Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities, sustainability is considered from the outset and integrated into practice. Through this supplement, we were able to deploy the planning components of our model in the community of Acres Homes through Be Well™ Acres Homes. Acres Homes is a city of Houston neighborhood with a population of approximately 58,000 people, 47 percent Black and 43 percent Hispanic. Although Acres Homes is a high-need community, it is also rich in assets, including actively engaged community members, small businesses, and a heritage based in agriculture.



Be Well Acres Homes is executed in collaboration with Harris Health System, Memorial Hermann Community Benefit Corporation, UTHealth School of Public Health, and more than 30 community organizations united together with residents of Acres Homes. Supported by this supplement, 15 shared community governance meetings were held, convening an average of 53 attendees from over 30 organizations at each meeting. For those organizations interested in carrying out evidence-based interventions in the community, two training sessions were provided. These sessions addressed identifying and selecting effective strategies, developing an appropriate evaluation plan, and participating in a collaborative project with a common agenda.

To further support these partners as well as other organizations in the future, this project also focused on creating a resource that aims to empower community-based organizations—such as schools, community colleges, non-profit organizations, workplaces, government agencies, and policymakers—with proven strategies or evidence-based interventions. Many leading health organizations have put together robust tools to support organizations to select and implement evidence-based interventions. This document serves as a primer to support organizations—especially those who do not focus primarily on health—with selecting evidence-based cancer prevention and chronic disease interventions that can be implemented at the community level.

Building on a roadmap for community investment developed by community residents themselves through the city of Houston Mayor's Office of Complete Communities, 18 collaborating organizations will implement 20 evidence-based interventions focused on active living and healthy eating. These projects will be guided by the steering committee to ensure that resident feedback and long-term sustainability are built into all aspects of the work.

Initial activities include:

- expanding exercise and healthy eating programs for all ages
- building community and school-based gardens
- increasing access to fresh, healthy food
- improving parks, trails, and places for physical activity

While this project is in the beginning stages of implementation, the important first steps of collaboration necessary for a long-term collaborative future are taking shape, as measured by a stakeholder survey administered to the steering committee at two-time points (November 2020 and July 2021) by RTI International. Stakeholders reported that they are developing new partners in the community, working together more effectively, and connecting with others in ways that will lead to a positive impact as a result of this initiative. Additionally, stakeholders report that the initiative has a common agenda, a shared vision, and clear goals. Finally, stakeholders feel confident that the CAP reflects the priorities of the community and will reach the residents most in need.

The enthusiasm among partners and community members is building in Acres Homes, and MD Anderson is privileged to guide this program in partnership with the community now and in the years to come.

Implementation Guidance

At the heart of the Be Well Communities model is community permissibility and cultivation of deep trust. By using a collaborative approach led by the wants and needs of the community and effectively executing the programs selected by the community, an effective infrastructure can be built that promises to improve cancer-related outcomes in the community over the long term.

To reduce the risk of cancer, it is critical to empower community-based organizations—such as schools, community colleges, non-profit organizations, workplaces, government agencies, and policymakers—with proven strategies or evidence-based interventions, especially in communities with limited resources that can be implemented over the long term. Integrating sustainability

early in the planning phase for the individual evidence-based interventions as well as for the initiative overall can help to ensure long-term dedication to the health and wellness of the community. The newly developed resource created as part of this supplement is intended to support organizations with their implementation.



Find Out More

To find out more about our work with the community and stay up to date on implementation of the community action plan, check out our website.

www.mdanderson.org/BeWellCommunities

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Community outreach and engagement (COE) activities across the translational research continuum

National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers' COE efforts should span all cancer center programs, including basic, clinical, translational, and population research. In FY20, NCI issued a call for Cancer Center Administrative Supplements to support COE activities that focus on either basic science or the translation of evidence-based interventions into community practice. The long-term goal of the supplement initiative is to build capacity for cancer centers' COE programs to adapt and implement evidence-based programs and successfully collaborate with cancer center investigators across research programs and in partnership with community members. To learn more, visit us at: <https://cancercontrol.cancer.gov/research-emphasis/coe>