

17 healthy eating, living projects get funding

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Approximately \$300,000 in federal stimulus funding has been awarded to 17 projects, striving to make positive changes in more than 15,000 Hawaii Island residents' eating, physical activity and tobacco use habits, Hawaii Island Beacon Community announced Wednesday.

The Hawaii Island Beacon is a consortium of healthcare and community leaders that was created to improve healthcare quality, efficiency and population health islandwide. The projects will receive \$3,000 to \$20,000, said Jessica Yamamoto, Beacon's community engagement manager.

Part of Beacon's Healthy Eating and Active Living Program, the projects "deliver innovative, targeted outreach into the communities where it is needed most," said Susan Hunt, Beacon's CEO.

Running through 2013, the projects include gardening and education programs on local food production and nutrition; free counseling on lifestyle changes and health screenings; education and prevention to reduce tobacco smoking; introduction to roller derby; as well as exercise programs and support groups.

Of the projects, eight take place in West Hawaii. Those project organizers are Hawaii County Economic Opportunity Council, The Kohala Center, Children's Research Triangle, Five Mountains Hawaii, Kahoomiki, Family Support Hawaii, Naalehu Elementary School and Coalition of a Tobacco-Free Hawaii, Yamamoto said.

Throughout the year, updates and testimonials will be posted at hibeacon.org.

"As (Beacon) witnesses and supports the growth of a movement to improve health and health care, we hope to catalyze even greater synergy among organizations and advance the development of long-term solutions," Hunt said.

The funding will help Family Support Hawaii's Mothers on the Move, a program that promotes appropriate physical activities for at least 100 low-income pregnant mothers and their children in North and South Kona. It strives to improve positive birth outcomes and help establish healthy habits that will last a lifetime. Fathers and other caregivers are also welcomed, said Krista Olson, Family Support Hawaii health and nutrition specialist.

Free exercise activities, including walking, yoga, gardening, and ocean activities, will be offered. Those in the West Hawaii Early Head Start Program will have the opportunity to get the one-on-one activities at their homes. Participants will also learn about nutrition, early childhood obesity prevention, breastfeeding, and healthy sleep patterns. Prizes based on participation will be awarded and include items, such as baby carriers and yoga mats, to keep people motivated, Olson said.

Five Mountains Hawaii will use the funding for Get Fit Hawaii, its free team-based, 10-week lifestyle program that gives participants various health resources and special offers to support their goals in nutrition, physical activity and stress resilience. It has offered this program for five years and roughly 300 people, mostly in North Hawaii, participated in 2011. Most had a heightened interest in and were incorporating better nutrition, as well as practicing a more active lifestyle and found friends or family adopting the same practice because of their participation, said Ann DiLoreto, Five Mountain Hawaii program coordinator.

"The key part is awareness. If you don't have your health, you don't have anything," she said.

The funding will help The Kohala Center provide a deeper knowledge of nutritional education and training for the more than 60 public, private and charter school garden teachers islandwide. Four workshops with a Kaiser Permanente nutritionist will be offered this summer, said Nancy

Redfeather, program director of the center's Hawaii Island School Garden Network.

Hawaii County Economic Opportunity Council will use the funding to hold a free six-hour-long summer program that offers 40 Ocean View and Naalehu children physical activities, including gardening, and academic tutoring. The goal is to help youth stay active, eat well, live a healthy lifestyle, as well as retain, catch up or get ahead in math and language arts. The building of a garden acts as a circuit for these children to enjoy the outdoors, work together and learn about food production, said Bettie Wagstaff, the council's operations director.

Project organizers with Naalehu Elementary School, Coalition of a Tobacco-Free Hawaii, Kahoomiki and Children's Research Triangle could not be reached as of press time.