Issue Brief
Using *The Community Guide* to Improve Preconception Health Efforts

**AMCHP’s Role**

The Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs (AMCHP) is a national resource, partner and advocate for state public health leaders and others working to improve the health of women, children, youth and families, including those with special health care needs.

*AMCHP supports state maternal and child health (MCH) programs and provides national leadership on issues affecting women and children.* We work with partners at the national, state and local levels to expand medical homes; provide and promote family-centered, community-based, coordinated care for children with special health care needs; and facilitate the development of community-based systems of services for children and their families.

**The Guide to Community Preventive Services**

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based findings about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety. It contains the findings of the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force – an independent, nonfederal, unpaid body of public health and prevention experts – bases its findings on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy and practice-based partners.

The Community Guide can be used in a number of ways, including to:

- **Develop public policy** – Identify evidence-based policies to help draft legislation; justify funding proposals; support policies and legislation that promote health
- **Plan programs and services** – Select evidence-based interventions to address health needs and objectives
- **Allocate resources** – Determine which interventions optimize use of limited resources
- **Inform surveillance** – Develop surveillance and research agendas and funding announcements
- **Educate health professionals** – Educate about evidence-based public health interventions

**Preconception Health**

Preconception health is the health of women and couples before conception of a first or subsequent pregnancy. Preconception health interventions include a set of interventions that identify and modify biomedical, behavioral, and social risks to a woman’s health and future pregnancies. Implementing policies and programs that focus on preconception health is a critical emerging issue for state and local health departments and federal agencies. In order to be effective and optimize resources, preconception health interventions are best when they are based on best practices and evidence-based strategies. The Community Guide offers evidence for preconception health interventions in the areas of folic acid use, obesity prevention and control, increased physical activity, tobacco cessation, and depression screening.
Topics in *The Community Guide*
Relevant to Preconception Health

**Folic Acid Use**
Access to folic acid supplements during the preconception period reduces neural tube defects, which is of concern to women of childbearing age or women intending to become pregnant. The Task Force recommends the following strategies:
- **Community-wide campaigns to promote the use of folic acid supplements.** These campaigns involve the dissemination of coordinated educational and motivational messages and materials within the community. Educational content can be delivered through:
  - Mass media messages and articles
  - Community activities and promotions
  - Distribution of small media (posters, flyers, brochures, etc.)

**Obesity Prevention and Control**
The increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity among women of childbearing age is a growing public health concern. Obesity increases the risk of complications during pregnancy and can lead to poorer birth outcomes for the child and the mother. The Task Force recommends the following types of strategies for obesity prevention and control in community settings:
- **Technology-supported multi-component coaching or counseling interventions to reduce weight and maintain weight loss:** These interventions use technology such as pedometers or computer programs with other tools to facilitate weight-related behaviors or weight-related outcomes
- **Worksite Programs:** These interventions intend to promote healthy weight and BMI by targeting employees’ behaviors; the programs may occur separately or as part of a comprehensive worksite wellness program

**Increase Physical Activity**
Physical inactivity can lead to heart disease, type-2 diabetes, obesity, depression, anxiety and stress, all of which can contribute to poor birth outcomes. The Task Force recommends:
- **Community-wide campaigns to increase physical activity.** These large-scale campaigns deliver messages that promote physical activity by using television, radio, newspaper columns and inserts, and trailers in movie theaters. They involve many community sectors and include components such as social support, health screening and health education
- **Individually adapted health behavior change programs.** These interventions are tailored to the individual’s specific interests, preferences, and readiness for change. Participants learn the behavioral skills needed to incorporate moderate physical activity into daily routines
- **Social support in community settings.** These interventions focus on building, strengthening, and maintaining social networks, such as walking groups or “buddy” systems, that provide supportive relationships for behavior change, specifically physical activity

**Tobacco Cessation**
Smoking by pregnant women remains one of the most common preventable causes of infant morbidity and mortality. The Task Force recommends:
- **Multicomponent interventions that include telephone support.** These provide people who use tobacco products with cessation counseling or assistance in attempting to quit using tobacco products and to maintain abstinence
- **Provider reminders when used alone.** These interventions for tobacco cessation include efforts to identify clients who use tobacco products and to prompt providers through tools, such as checklists or medical records, to advise clients about quitting

**Depression Screening**
If a woman is experiencing psychosocial stress when she becomes pregnant, she may be more susceptible to a number of pregnancy complications, including preterm birth. The Task Force recommends:
- **Collaborative care for the management of depressive disorders.** This intervention uses case managers to link primary care providers, patients and mental health specialists to care for a patient. Collaboration is designed to improve the routine screening and diagnosis of depressive disorders; increase provider use of evidence-based protocols, and improve clinical and community support for active patient engagement in treatment goal setting and self-management.

**Sources and Selected Resources for Additional Information:**
- **CDC Recommendations to Improve Preconception Health and Health Care** [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5506a1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5506a1.htm)