INTRODUCTION

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends adults achieve 150 minutes per week of at least moderate intensity activity combined with ≥ 2 days/week of muscle-strengthening activity. Balance activities are encouraged for individuals at all activity levels. Children should spend 60 minutes a day in moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA), that also includes bone loading and muscle-strengthening. Efforts to improve the PA behaviors of the U.S. populations have been minimal at best, particularly in areas identified as high obesity pockets. These are generally low-income, often rural areas where there are few potential partners to intervene and resources may be scarce.

CES is located in most every county in each U.S. state thus providing the infrastructure to penetrate these high obesity pockets through evidence-based PA promotion strategies.

METHODS

We surveyed Cooperative Extension System (CES) personnel across the U.S. (Figure 1) to understand the scope of physical activity (PA) promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts. Our aim was to identify factors that would enable the CES to improve its collective PA promotion efforts.

The CES survey was created in Qualtrics software (Provo, Utah: Qualtrics Inc.).

Survey items assessed three areas; PA beliefs and behaviors, PA promotion activities, and perceived support for PA promotion efforts (Figure 2).

RESULTS

1. 1,063 surveys were returned from 47 states. 804 of those were ≥ 95% complete and included in analyses.

2. 76.7% of survey respondents were county-based personnel (versus campus-based), and had been working within CES for 9 ± 8.6 years; 88% were female.

3. Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents engaged in various direct education, school- and community-level PA promotion efforts.

4. There is a disconnect between effort and training.

5. 13.7% of survey respondents engage in PA promotion activities as part of CES work, and behaviors, PA promotion activities, and perceived support for PA promotion efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Most CES PA promotion efforts are direct education embedded within nutrition education; However, ≥ 50% of CES personnel are engaged in school- and community-level PA efforts that include PSE approaches.

2. Professional development does not adequately support PA promotion efforts and reporting.

3. Recommendations include CES-wide trainings and development of common metrics to assess impact.

4. With training gaps addressed and system-side reporting of impacts implemented, CES has the potential to serve as a nationwide partner in PA promotion efforts.

ABSTRACT

Cooperative Extension System (CES) health and nutrition personnel engage in research, education, and outreach programming that reaches constituents in every U.S. state and territory. In response to the growing obesity epidemic, CES has increasingly included physical activity (PA) promotion as part of community-based research, education, and outreach efforts, predominately in the context of nutrition education programming.

To optimize our efforts, we need a better understanding of what different states are doing, and the supports and barriers CES personnel experience.

PURPOSE: To characterize the scope of physical activity promotion activities of CES professionals across the U.S. and identify opportunities for professional development to maximize the collective impact of CES physical activity promotion efforts.

METHODS: We applied a cross-sectional design to collect survey data from land grant institutions within all 50 U.S. states. Survey items assessed three areas: physical activity (PA) beliefs and behaviors, PA promotion activities, and perceived support for PA promotion efforts.

RESULTS: Responses (N=1063; n=804 complete surveys used in this analysis) were received from 47 states. Respondents were predominately county-based (88%) ages 18-29 (18.5%); 30-39 (17.8%); 40-49 (20.4%); 50-59 (27.2%); 60 or over (19.7%). Responders were predominately county-based (76.7%); versus campus-based, and had been working with CES for 9 ± 8.6 years. CES efforts are equivalent across rural and non-rural areas and more than 60% of respondents work with government nutrition assistance education programs (SNAP-Ed and/or EFNEP). All agree that engaging in PA is important, however, ≤ 50% personally meet the PA guidelines for muscle strengthening or aerobic activity. A majority of respondents engage in PA promotion activities as part of CES work, but few have formal training (13.7%), receive professional development (50.9%), or have clearly articulated job expectations or reporting requirements related to PA promotion efforts (39.9%).

CONCLUSION: A majority of CES personnel across the U.S. engage in a variety of PA promotion and programming efforts, but gaps exist in training and administrative support or documentation of these efforts. Trainings to address PA promotion efforts and impact/outcome assessment are needed.