

Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi  
*Healthy Congregations Progress Report*

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Mississippi faces a great challenge in chronic disease prevention and control, including childhood obesity. In addition to high rates of illness and low access to care, the burden is compounded by high poverty rates, low educational levels, and limited prevention programs. The result has been evidenced in rates of cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer, obesity and diabetes that are among the highest in the nation. Changing the tide in chronic disease is critical to Mississippi's future generations.

**Connection**

The Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi, through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, established a Healthy Congregations project to connect leaders already in place in small towns and communities with evidence based health programs that prevent childhood obesity. In addition to providing a forum for pastors, priests, ministers, and volunteers to share ideas and resource, the program has created materials that take into account the context of life in the rural south. A Tool Kit, Community Gardens Planning Guide, and Regional Coalition are examples of the methods now used to advance environmental changes in the Mississippi Delta through faith communities.

**Community Impact**

The Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi's Healthy Congregation Project was able to create a GIS map of the region to target areas where social determinants like education, poverty, and access combine to contribute to obesity rates and poor health. Most recently, the project was invited to plan a one day workshop as part of the Empowering Healthy Communities for a Healthy Mississippi Conference. The workshop will share faith community strategies to improve healthy eating and physical activity to reduce childhood obesity. Over three hundred individuals from across Mississippi are expected to attend the conference; sixty will participate in the workshop. Participants will learn both evidence based interventions and advocacy strategies to improve health in rural Mississippi communities. The resulting network of trained individuals and organizations will serve as a support system for grassroots programs that are led by the faith community and matched with resources to improve health and reduce the childhood obesity rate in Mississippi.



Healthy Congregations training October 2008



*Healthy Congregations*