

Every County Counts: Empowering Communities Against Cancer, the Cancer in Iowa: 99 Counties Project

A. Kahl, W. Zahnd, A. Gronemeyer, R. Schramm, M. Hartwig, N. Askelson, K. Wells Sittig, M. Charlton

Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Iowa

1. Background

Iowa has the second highest cancer incidence rate in the United States (U.S.) which has led to increasing interest in cancer across the state. Many people are concerned about why Iowa has a high incidence and want to know more about the cancer rates and risk factors in their communities. Cancer registries are a unique data resource with expertise that can help communities understand their cancer control and prevention needs.

2. Goals

- Provide Iowans in all 99 counties with cancer data specific to their county
- Provide information about risk factors and screening guidelines, along with actions they can take to address cancer concerns and promote healthier communities
- Answer questions and listen to concerns of the community

3. Solutions and Methods

The project team includes the Iowa Cancer Registry (ICR); Iowa Cancer Consortium (ICC); the University of Iowa (UI) Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center, whose catchment area includes the entire state of Iowa; Iowa Rural Health Association; and Iowa Health and Human Services (IHHS). The project was presented at the statewide public health director's meeting organized by the IHHS. At this meeting, a survey was shared to gauge the level of interest of each county's public health director in helping to plan the meeting in their respective counties. Counties were then divided into batches that prioritized the most interested counties and those with the highest incidence rates.

To plan presentations, each county's public health director is invited to attend a 30-minute planning meeting that covers the project's objectives, logistics, and strategies for inviting community members. A cross-organizational planning team develops outreach lists for each county. Event registration is hosted by ICC, which facilitates longer-term engagement with cancer control. After each presentation, an evaluation survey is administered to the county's public health planning teams and participants.

The advertising flyers and presentations are created in Tableau, which automatically populates county-specific meeting information and data. The presentations include information on the county's top five cancers, including incidence and mortality, stage, screening guidelines and other health behaviors related to cancer risk. These data points are compared to state and U.S. data.

4. Outcomes

Within the first 11 months, presentations for 41 out of 99 counties were completed, and more than 1,800 participants attended these meetings. Several counties have used these presentations to continue momentum to address the cancer burden in their counties including applying for and receiving grants to provide radon testing and assistance for radon mitigation, adding cancer as a focus of Community Health Improvement Plans, becoming study sites in a UI lung cancer screening grant, follow-up meetings to discuss local policies for tobacco and alcohol, and hosting a prostate cancer luncheon and free screening clinic. Over 1,500 media items have referenced the ICR during this timeframe.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

This project increased the visibility of the ICR and the importance of cancer registries to the general public. To sustain the momentum created by these meetings beyond the project period, dashboards are in development to display county-level data similar to the presentations. These dashboards will be updated annually and accessible on the ICR website.