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Improving public health through great-tasting water

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Background

Health organisations in the region made a commitment to remove sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) from site leading to an increase in potable water consumption.

Portland District Health (PDH) has made a commitment to remove SSB from site as an initiative to enhance community health outcomes. The commitment highlighted that cordial was being added to the water to mask issues with taste. Wannon Water (WW) recognises that whilst the town water is safe and complies with the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, there is a significant proportion of customers who are dissatisfied with the taste. PDH and WW identified the opportunity to improve the taste of water supplied in the hospital which would help PDH deliver the primary objective of removing SSB. The project is a pilot which will provide valuable data to support considerations for improving the taste of water for the whole of the township.

Aim

To present the collaboration between our health service (PDH) and our local water corporation (Wannon Water), enabling the provision of Great Tasting Water to not only the PDH community, but also the broader Portland community. To present baseline data from the evaluation research that is also taking place in conjunction with Deakin University, including water and sugary drink consumption, and sales data of beverages within the facility.

Methods

The partnership links into the SEA Change Portland initiative (collective impact approach to obesity prevention) a community collaboration using systems thinking framework to improve health outcomes. Using group model building (GMB); key community leaders and members were invited to subsequently devise possible actions that would lead to increased water consumption.

Media activity alerted Wannon Water to the idea that PDH was looking to work in collaboration with community to drive initiatives and significantly improve strategic public health outcomes.

Results

Baseline data is still being collected. It will be analyzed and presented at the conference. Post-installation data will be collected 6-months post-installation, and will not be available at the time of the conference.

WW have committed to install a \$100,000 reverse osmosis plant into the facility and install public drinking fountains as part of their corporate vision to go 'beyond water for strong communities'.

Conclusion

A collaboration with a health organisation and a water authority has led to major infrastructure investment at a regional health service resulting in all departments having improved water taste, and also two fountains for public use.

Recommendation

We call on Governments at all levels to increase their investment in primary prevention and early intervention, as the most cost effective means of improving health outcomes.

The investment to support Water Authorities improve the taste of water supporting with behaviour change programs as a method of enhancing community health outcomes.

Presenter

Kelly Edwards is presently the Health Promotion Manager for the Portland District Health Organisation. She is currently in the Great South Coast of Victoria working with key partner Global Obesity Centre at Deakin University around fostering and building partnerships with communities in the aim of empowering them to develop and sustain obesity prevention efforts. Having been working in the prevention space for approximately four years, Kelly is part of the collaboration backbone support for the SEA Change Initiative, leading a systems approach to preventing childhood obesity. Empowering the community to make changes to the environment making the healthy choice the easy choice, using the collective impact framework to bring organisations together with a shared agenda. She has been currently working with GLOBE at Deakin University on supporting this practice through evidence and building local capacity through asset-based community development and ensuring that the process and action is researched and evaluated. Kelly holds a Bachelor of Commerce Majoring in Marketing and Management and has been working for the past nine years in Community Development with Committee for Portland, with a view to advocate and facilitate the future development of Portland.