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Montana – Culture of Excellence

The Montana Cardiac Ready Communities Program

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Montana is a large state with long stretches of road between communities. The time-sensitive nature of cardiovascular emergencies requires all links in the chain of survival be as strong as possible to improve survival rates and decrease disability for the state's 1.3 million residents. The Cardiac Ready Communities (CRC) Program aims to improve outcomes and increase survival for individuals suffering a cardiac emergency through development and implementation of high-performance cardiac systems of care across Montana.

STEPS TAKEN

Each community formed a local coalition to address weak links in the chain. Starting with a gap analysis tool, areas of improvement were identified. Coalition members developed an improvement plan based on the gaps, using a toolkit provided by the CRC program. After improvements were made and tested, the program leaders assessed the plan and implementation to evaluate the community. If benchmarks were met, the community was recognized as being “cardiac ready.”

CHALLENGES

Smaller communities in Montana had difficulty finding individuals with the time to devote to the project. The lack of funding for the program also made communities responsible for finding ways to purchase AEDs, provide education/outreach and support other activities. And while larger communities had more resources, they were more siloed in their projects. Breaking down barriers was also a challenge, as the frontier nature of the state makes travel and communication more daunting.

RESULTS

The number of Montana EMS Agencies Participating in CARES has steadily increased since 2016. With 18 agencies participating, approximately 70% of the population of the state is covered. Survival rates are slightly higher than the national average at 12% over a three-year period.

The first community to be successfully recognized as “cardiac ready” was Glasgow, MT. In 2018, USA Today News named Glasgow as the official “middle of nowhere” in the lower 48 states. This small community located about 60 miles south of Canada, worked for over two years to receive its cardiac ready designation. Led by a core team of three individuals — the county health nurse, the EMS



Glasgow Cardiac Ready Communities team receiving their recognition from Janet Trethewey, MT Cardiac Ready Communities Program Manager

director and the hospital foundation director — all the criteria for a cardiac ready community were met. Funds were raised to purchase several AEDs, several hundred people learned CPR and the local radio station continued to air public service announcements about the program. The program proved itself when an individual had a cardiac arrest at the high school and was resuscitated prior to EMS arrival.

OUTLOOK

The CRC program continues to collect data to support the implementation of programs, and communities are provided technical support as they begin the process. Engagement of the PCI hospitals and the MT Hospital Association has begun to formally define the Montana Cardiac System to integrate programs and projects more seamlessly. Ongoing education and training of EMS agencies and critical access hospitals aims to improve those first steps in patient care. Bystander CPR education and AED distribution are also top priorities for the program.

CONTACT

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Valley County Health Nurse Lynne Miller reviewing Cardiac Ready Community evaluation results with MT EMS Program Manager Shari Graham



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