

Patricia Daniluk, MS, RD Creating a New Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Unit

Patricia Daniluk, Colorado's Nutrition Services and WIC Director, played a lead role in creating a new **Early Childhood Obesity Prevention (ECOP)** unit in her Division that is funded through multiple programs. Developing a new ECOP position, which has now grown to three full-time staff, took several years — and it took Patricia's creativity and persistence. This effort grew from Patricia's partnership with the Colorado MCH program and her commitment to the life course theory of public health. Life course theory points to the importance of focusing on pre-conception, pregnancy, infancy and preschool years as the foundation of life-long health and wellbeing.

Back in 2008, Patricia and her colleagues at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment brought together a working group that included representatives from MCH, WIC, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Breastfeeding Initiatives and the CDC-funded Nutrition and Physical Activity (COPAN) grant, as well as key partners outside the Department. These external partners included Livewell Colorado, the Colorado Health Foundation, Kaiser Permanente and other organizations. The working group sought to determine how the Department could best leverage its resources to achieve the greatest outcome in preventing childhood obesity.

The working group contracted with researchers to conduct assessments, literature and evidence reviews, gap analyses and interviews to guide the Department's decision making. From this research, in 2011 the Department made the decision to pool existing funding from MCH, WIC and COPAN to create a new ECOP position, which would report to Patricia in the Department's Nutrition Services Branch. When she took this new position, public health nutritionist Tracy Miller, MSPH, RD, was charged with integrating the obesity prevention efforts of multiple state programs to meet the state's ECOP measures.

Throughout this time, it was Patricia's steadfastness and perseverance that built the momentum to create this new position. She helped her colleagues



Pictured: Patricia Daniluk, MS, RD

About Patricia

Patricia has been an ASPHN member since 1992. She is the past chair of the ASPHN Maternal and Child Health Nutrition Council. She has been with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for 24 years, and she has served as the Colorado WIC Director for seven years.

Patricia is a fourth generation Coloradan. Her maternal grandmother lived in a mining camp in Clear Creek County, west of Denver, not too far from where Patricia grew up in Idaho Springs. Patricia left Colorado for graduate school at Boston University, and she worked in Virginia, New Orleans and Idaho before returning to Colorado. She and her husband wanted to raise their two sons in Colorado, and it was important to Patricia to contribute to improving the health of Coloradans from the Rockies to the Plains.

in other programs and agencies see the value — and the possibility — of drawing existing funds from several funding programs to get a much larger bang for their buck. Through her focused efforts, Patricia worked with leaders in the Department's multiple divisions and branches to understand that this new re-distributing of funding streams would meet the needs and directives of the different funding sources.

The Program's Success

Patricia and her colleagues see the new ECOP unit as a great success, although they acknowledge that it will take some time to see obesity rates go down. Patricia's colleagues in the Department and those working on the local level now see the benefits of bringing together the varied agencies and programs working on obesity prevention. They also see the benefit and the value of focusing their obesity prevention work on the earliest states of life. Patricia views it as a great success that her division now acknowledges the great need to focus their efforts at pre-conception, pregnancy and the first years of life.

Over the three years that Patricia and her colleagues worked to develop this new life course focus on obesity prevention — and in her role as Colorado's Nutrition Services and WIC Director — Patricia was a consistent and persistent voice for the critical role nutrition plays in obesity prevention. Patricia believes that it is important that the state's public health nutritionists highlight the specific skills that they bring to the issue.

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Public Health Nutritionists Are Essential

Public health nutritionists are professionals with academic training and experience in both public health **and** nutrition, who are often registered dietitians with advanced degrees. Public health nutritionists possess diverse skills and expertise ranging from nutrition science...to food systems and food environments...to finance and grant management.

More information on the role and value of public health nutritionists is available in ASPHN's briefs on **The Role of Public Health Nutrition in Obesity Prevention** and **Improving the Nutritional Well-Being of Women, Children and Families**.



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