Rock County coalition tackles STI awareness, prevention

**Description:** To address the high rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the Rock County Coalition for STI Prevention project focused its initial efforts on community awareness, education and outreach. This was the first collaborative effort in the county to focus solely on STIs, creating an opportunity for individuals and organizations to share their expertise, ideas and resources for effective initiatives aimed at reducing STIs and improving the overall reproductive health of county residents.

**Relevance:** Rock County consistently has one of the highest STI rates in Wisconsin, and the city of Beloit is disproportionately affected by the high rates. From 2009 to 2012, the number of confirmed STIs in Rock County increased an average of 8.8 percent annually, with the number of confirmed gonorrhea cases rising 23.5 percent between 2011 and 2012.

In the 2012 County Health Rankings, Rock County ranked 68th out of Wisconsin’s 72 counties in health behaviors and had the fifth highest rate of chlamydia infection in the state.

STIs are associated with a significantly increased risk of cervical cancer, infertility and premature death. Risky sexual behavior also can influence infant mortality rates.

**Results:** This project successfully established a multi-sector and self-sustaining coalition with representatives from 29 community agencies and organizations. The coalition used the Community Readiness Model, developed by the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research at Colorado State University, to assess the potential for addressing the issue of STIs.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and scored independently by two people. The scorers then discussed the results and calculated an overall score. Because Rock County’s stage of readiness was extremely low (a two out of nine), the coalition decided its main objective would be to increase knowledge and awareness of STIs among county residents. This included awareness about the level of the problem, basic information about STIs and resources for prevention, testing and treatment.

The coalition developed an implementation plan to address prevention, testing and treatment of STIs. The plan had five phases: start-up, assessment, capacity building, planning and implementation.

Near the end of the grant period, Lesley Wolf of the Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health facilitated a three-part capacity building and strategic planning workshop with the coalition. She assisted the coalition with developing a sustainability plan for continued work beyond the funding period and provided guidance on coalition structure and improving participation.

