

PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM SURVEY- Other PH Prevention

Contact Information

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Short Title: Certified Children's Vision Screenings

Program Location: Statewide in Virginia, throughout Washington DC

Objectives and Goals:

This program provides national certification and standardized training, as well as equipment, for school nurses to complete their state-mandated vision screenings. Nurses in Virginia also receive contact hours (continuing education credits) through VNA. In the absence of a standardized protocol to complete these screenings, we provide an effective, efficient and consistent method of completing these required mass screenings in a way that has been proven to save sight by catching vision problems early so that they can be treated without permanent vision loss. Funded by outside sources, this program has been made available to every school system in Virginia and in Washington DC at no cost to the schools; the program includes vision screening supplies and equipment and adds a stereopsis component which is not currently required or performed in most schools. Our goal is to implement and *maintain* this program in all of Virginia and DC and to duplicate these efforts in Maryland.

Methods:

Funding for this program has been received from community organizations, foundations and corporations, as well as private donors and some assistance from the state budget, so that it could be provided at no cost to the school systems. Once funding was received for a school system, the nurses received their certification training and their supplies. Once the nurses are certified, they have access to our resources, which include vouchers for free eye exams and glasses for qualified children. Last year, more than 360,000 children received certified vision screenings through this program.

Program Length:

This program is ongoing; it began in 2004. By the end of the 2009-2010 school year every school system in VA will have had the opportunity to participate and

we will continue to offer our support and resources to those nurses and to expand our services throughout Maryland.

Number of target population reached by effort:

More than 360,000 children receive our certified vision screenings annually. Upon completion more than 600,000 children will benefit EACH YEAR in VA, DC and MD.

Demographic Info:

All children in public schools in VA, DC and MD are required to have vision screenings at certain age levels mandated by state law and as newly-enrolled students. The goal of this program is to provide standardized vision screenings to all of these children, regardless of economic status or other demographic information. Vouchers for free eye exams and glasses are available to qualified children (requirements include <200% poverty level income and no access to vision coverage).

Overall Cost:

The cost to implement and maintain this program is an average of \$2.05 per child per year. The overall cost is dependent upon the number of school systems in which we screen and the number of children that receive the screenings.

Funding Sources:

4% State
96% Other, funded primarily by civic organizations, foundations and corporations
percentages ARE estimates

Outcomes:

Since the beginning of the program, more than 1.2 million children have received certified vision screenings; with the number of children screened each year increasing this number will grow exponentially. Our most recent evaluation of the data collected from referral reports returned to us by doctors examining those children who are referred as a result of our screenings indicate an over-referral rate of <5%.

More than \$850,000 in vouchers for free eye exams and glasses have been issued since the program began; \$240,000 (more than 1,000 vouchers) of those were in the last year alone. Given the annual growth of this program, this number is also expected to increase rapidly.

Did you make any estimates regarding costs deferred, outbreaks averted or deaths prevented?

None made above.

However, the following has been used as an estimate of savings to the public:

“Considering that Virginia taxpayers are investing approximately \$10,000 per child per year for public education, if even one child is unsuccessful in school due to something as simple and correctible as poor vision it is a travesty. More than 88,000 children start kindergarten every year in Virginia. If 3% of Kindergarten

children have undetected amblyopia they are not getting the best out of their education; that's \$26.4 million in wasted tax dollars. This example is reflective only of Kindergarteners with amblyopia and does not include the other 22% of school children who have vision impairment significant enough to affect their learning."

Additional Information:

The Certified Children's Vision Screening Program was developed by Prevent Blindness America through the work of a national panel of experts in vision care and pediatrics. This medically-endorsed program provides standardized training, testing, reporting, and continual evaluation. The Commonwealth of Virginia takes a pro-active approach to vision care for children by requiring vision screenings in school; however, this is an un-funded mandate with no standard protocol. The goal of this program is to standardize the protocol and provide the most effective, efficient vision screenings possible and to provide the follow-up resources as described above.

About 85% of what a child learns in a normal classroom setting is through vision and 1 in 4 school children has vision impairment significant enough to affect learning. In addition to acuity deficiencies in children, roughly 3% of children are affected by amblyopia, a potentially blinding disorder if undetected and left untreated. Prior to the Prevent Blindness Statewide Certified Children's Vision Screening Program, most schools were not addressing amblyopia in their state-mandated vision screenings.

Future Plans:

Our goal is to maintain this program for all localities in Virginia and DC and to expand the program to include all localities in Maryland. Ideally, funding and protocol for this program would be supported by state legislation. In the absence of public funding, maintaining this program at its current level and growing it to serve additional communities is dependent entirely upon support from community organizations, foundations, corporations and private donors.