

## Diabetes prevention in focus as Delaware YMCA partners with national program

Written by Kelly Bothum The News Journal

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Thanks to a year-long diabetes prevention program offered by the YMCA of Delaware, Louis Masci learned how to read labels and exercise hard enough to break a sweat.

He lost enough weight to lower his blood glucose and cholesterol levels. But he's still working hard to make more changes, he told the health experts who gathered Friday at the Central YMCA in Wilmington for a roundtable discussion about ways to reduce the diabetes epidemic that's threatening to shorten the lives of millions of Americans.

"I'm still considered obese. I need to lose 16 more pounds to be considered overweight. That's my goal," said Masci, 71. "I consider losing weight as a journey, not a destination."

The Y's diabetes prevention program has been chosen for a national pilot program targeting people with prediabetes. The YMCA of Delaware is partnering with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Medical Association to increase the number of patients screened treated for prediabetes, an indicator that a patient likely will later be diagnosed with diabetes if changes aren't made.

Details of the partnership were announced Friday during the event, which included Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Delaware is the first state announced as part of the joint effort with the Y, CDC and American Medical Association. Two other states have not yet been identified.

As part of the pilot, the AMA is collaborating with four Delaware-based physician practices to create a patient referral process with the hopes of getting more people with prediabetes enrolled in the Y's program.

Frieden said the Y's diabetes prevention program –which has drawn more than 16,000 participants nationally since it began –offers a cost-effective way to lower rates of obesity, reduce complications and help save lives, all of which drives down health care spending.

"We don't have a vaccine against diabetes. What we do have is the knowledge that modest changes in behavior can have a very substantial preventive effect," Frieden said.

Diabetes affects an estimated 26 million Americans. But there's an even bigger group of people who don't yet have the disease but who live with blood sugar problems that are likely to develop into diabetes in five to seven years if left untreated.

This impaired glucose tolerance is known as prediabetes, and more than 79 million Americans fall in this group. In Delaware, about 70,000 people are estimated to have prediabetes, said Rita Landgraf, secretary of the state Department of Health and Social Services. The numbers only continue to rise.

Because of its chronic nature, diabetes is a costly condition. A study on the burden of diabetes in Delaware found almost \$319 million was spent in direct medical costs, with another \$173 million in lost productivity.

It's cheaper to focus on efforts to prevent chronic health conditions than it is to pay for health-related costs after a diagnosis is made, Landgraf said, noting that every dollar spent on prevention saved \$5.60 in healthcare costs.

By comparison, someone with diabetes has \$7,900 in higher health costs than someone without the condition, Frieden said.

The Y's diabetes prevention program is a yearlong effort that includes 16 weeks of nutrition and exercise education from a lifestyle coach, with follow-up peer support and ongoing goal-setting. It's been running for almost four years, and in that time has worked with about 400 people, said Tricia Jefferson, director of Healthy Living for the YMCA of Delaware.

In most cases, people are referred to the program by their healthcare provider. As part of that, physicians are given information about how their patient is faring, including how many times they've attended and how much weight they've lost.

Thanks to the AMA partnership, the hope is that even more people will be able to take advantage of the program, which costs \$429 a year out of pocket. About 10 percent of participants receive some kind of financial assistance to be part of the Y program. In other parts of the country, insurers reimburse patients for successful completion of the program. So far, that's not the case in Delaware, but health officials said they hope that will change.

"This is about relationships, partnership and collaboration that can lead to actions and improved health outcomes," said Dr. Michael Rosenthal, chairman of the family and community medicine department at Christiana Care Health System. "This all can work together, which is kind of a neat thing happening in Delaware."

Christiana Care is one of four provider practices participating in the AMA pilot. The other practices are Family Practice Associates in Wilmington, Lewes Family Practice and Family Practice Center in Lewes.

For many patients, hearing that they are considered prediabetic can be a motivating experience, Frieden said. That was the case for Angela Smith, who used the diagnosis as an opportunity to take control of her health. She joined the Y's diabetes prevention program and lost more than 14 percent of her starting weight, dropping her blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure.

"The program definitely impacted my life and changed it for the better," she said.

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