

# What is a Health Education Specialist? . . . . .

Health education specialists work to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent and manage disease by empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health and positively influencing the policies and conditions that affect people's health where they live, learn, work, and play.



## Where Do Health Education Specialists Work?

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Health Statistics 2008 Census, there are more than 66,200 health educators (SOC Code 21-1091) working in the following settings:

- ◆ **Hospitals, Clinics and Health Plans:** To promote healthy lifestyles, help patients and families recover from illness and manage their condition, and provide training
- ◆ **Schools & Universities:** To assist students adopt healthful behaviors thereby improving academic performance.<sup>1</sup>
- ◆ **Municipal/County/State Public Health Departments:** To promote and protect the health of all populations living in their geographic area and achieve public health goals.
- ◆ **Nonprofit/Voluntary Organizations:** To provide education and services related to a particular disease or priority population.
- ◆ **Business/Industry:** To improve the health of employees. Chronic diseases and unhealthy behaviors affect the ability to work and increase employers' workers' compensation and health care costs, work-related injuries, absenteeism, as well as decreased productivity.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ **Universities:** To provide specialized curricula for future health educators and to conduct research on effective programs, policies and interventions.

## What Services Do Health Education Specialists Provide?

*At the individual and population-based levels, health education specialists:*

- Assess needs, assets and capacities for health education
- Plan evidence-based effective health education programs
- Implement health education policies, projects and programs
- Conduct evaluation and research related to health education
- Administer and manage health education
- Serve as a health education resource person
- Communicate and advocate for health and health education

## Where Are Health Education Specialists Trained?

More than 250 professional preparation programs around the country provide formal degrees in school and community/public health education at the baccalaureate, masters and doctoral levels. Many health education specialists hold master's degrees from schools and programs in public health. Curricula include a unique combination of instruction from the behavioral/social, epidemiological, environmental, and biomedical sciences, as well as health administration and public policy.

## What is a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES)?

The CHES designation signifies that an individual has met eligibility requirements for, and has successfully passed a competency-based examination demonstrating skill and knowledge of the [Seven Areas of Responsibility of Health Educators](#), upon which the credential is based. Certification is provided by the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing.

**Employment of health educators is expected to grow by 18 percent, which is faster than the average for all occupations through 2018. Growth will result from the rising cost of healthcare.**

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition*, Health Educators, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos063.htm> (visited February 27, 2010).

## Why Are Health Education Specialists Vital to the Nation?

- ◆ Health education improves the health status of individuals, communities, states, and the nation; enhances the quality of life for all people; and reduces costly premature deaths and disability.
- ◆ By focusing on prevention, health education reduces the costs (both financial and human) spent on medical treatment. Chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, consume more than 75 percent of the \$2.2 trillion spent on health care in the United States each year - the equivalent of about 2.5 economic "bailout" packages.<sup>3</sup> Spending as little as \$10 per person on proven preventive interventions could save the country over \$16 billion in just five years.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ Health education specialists offer knowledge, skills and training that compliment those of health providers, policy makers, educational experts, human resource personnel and many other professionals whose work impacts human health.
- ◆ Addressing a single risk factor (e.g., smoking) influences outcomes across multiple diseases, from preterm birth to lung disease and cancer. Addressing obesity in today's children alters the prevalence of many diseases (e.g. heart disease, cancer, diabetes, arthritis) that may be encountered decades later.<sup>5</sup>

1. Centers for Disease Control, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Student Health and Academic Achievement. Accessed on February 27, 2010 at [http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health\\_and\\_academics/index.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/health_and_academics/index.htm)  
2. National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (2009). School Resources, Worksite Resources and Community Resources. Accessed on February 17, 2009 at <http://www.achievecommunities.org/nacddresources.cfm>.  
3. Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease (2009). January 27, 2009 press release. Access on February 13, 2009 at <http://www.fightchronicdisease.org/media/statements/pfcd/Stimuluspackage.cfm>.  
4. Trust for America's Health (2008). *Prevention for a Healthier America: Investments in Disease Prevention Yield Significant Savings, Stronger Communities*. June, TFAH.  
5. California Department of Personnel Administration (2009). Worksite Resources. Accessed on February 19, 2009 at <http://www.dpa.ca.gov/benefits/health/wellness/guide/guidetoc.htm>.