



HYPERTENSION AWARENESS DAY AT THE NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION/AMERICAN STROKE ASSOCIATION

Million Hearts in Action

[Strategies for Achieving Million Hearts Goals]



Cardiovascular disease, which includes heart disease and stroke, is the leading cause of death in North Carolina, accounting for 26.5% of all deaths in 2012. High blood pressure is a primary or contributing cause for 45% of all cardiovascular disease deaths. Reducing high blood pressure would not only increase the quality of life for North Carolinians, but would also substantially impact healthcare costs and disability, as stroke is the state's leading cause of disability.

In 2013, the Justus-Warren Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Task Force (JWTF), established by the North Carolina General Assembly in 1995, collaborated with partner organizations such as the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association to host the first Hypertension Awareness Day. The event expanded in 2014.

[Fast Facts]

- More than 655,000 North Carolina adults – 8.9% of the state's population – have a history of heart attack, angina or stroke
- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of hospitalization in North Carolina, with more than \$6 billion in total hospital charges in 2012

[What We Did]

- Make it a top priority to educate lawmakers about high blood pressure. The Task Force pulls together policy makers, cardiovascular experts and other diverse stakeholders from across the state. The 2012 election resulted in one of the largest freshmen legislator classes in North Carolina history. Orienting the newly elected lawmakers about the burden of cardiovascular disease was identified as a top priority. To that end, Task Force members and partners worked together to hold the first Hypertension Awareness Day in 2013, which included a news conference with the Speaker of the House who called on everyone to know their blood pressure numbers and encouraged lawmakers to start the process of improving their own worksite environment.
- Build on the momentum of the inaugural event. Task Force members hosted Hypertension Awareness Day again in 2014, this time engaging the governor and both houses of the General Assembly in the effort by naming May 21, 2014, Hypertension Awareness Day in North Carolina. The event broadened the audience from lawmakers and their staff to the general public and raised awareness about the prevention, risk, prevalence, management and costs associated with high blood pressure. Key partners that worked with the Task Force to plan the 2014 event include:
 - North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians
 - American Heart Association/American Stroke Association
 - Prevention Committee of the JWTF Stroke Advisory Council
 - Carolinas Center for Medical Excellence
 - Consortium for Southeastern Hypertension Control



- Engage and educate legislators and their staffs. The 2014 Hypertension Awareness Day activities at the North Carolina General Assembly included the following:with the Task Force to plan the 2014 event include:
 - Volunteers from the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians offered free blood pressure screenings, accompanied by education and counseling.
 - Legislative champions emailed their respective chambers to invite lawmakers and their staffs to have their blood pressure checked.
 - Information about high blood pressure was delivered to all legislative offices.
 - Resolution was read on the floor of the House of Representatives.
 - Senatorial statement was read on the floor of the Senate.
 - Proclamation was received from the governor.
 - Media advisory was sent prior to the event and physician spokespersons were available the day of the event to talk with the media.

[What We Accomplished]

- Blood pressure was taken for more than 250 legislators, staff members and visitors. A number of blood pressure readings required medical follow-up.
- One lawmaker identified as having high blood pressure during the 2013 event followed up with his physician. This year his blood pressure was 40 points lower.
- The media was informed about the 2014 event, and it was featured in North Carolina Health News.



Based on just the individuals that I counseled regarding severe hypertension, I can confidently say that we significantly changed the lives of four people yesterday. One would have been enough for my efforts.”

- Brian Forrest, M.D., past president of the North Carolina Academy of Family Physicians

[What We Learned]

For organizations interested in planning a similar event, the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association recommends:

- Keeping the event simple, with a focus on education and blood pressure screening.
- Planning ahead. To get a governor’s proclamation, the request must be made well in advance of the date. Form a working group to organize the event about six months prior to the scheduled date. Reserve event space at the legislature well in advance.
- Partnering with various organizations/groups to ensure enough resources are available to hold a successful event.
- Having physicians do the blood pressure screenings because people take the readings more seriously.
- Identifying a House and Senate champion to help with the resolutions. Task Force co-chairs Senator Louis Pate and Representative Becky Carney helped engage other leaders.
- Choosing the event date wisely. Know what else is being promoted at the legislature during the month, but also make sure you choose a date that is relevant to the event. For example, May is American Stroke Month.

[What We Are Doing Now]

The Task Force and key partners are now planning the 2015 event, with the goal to have every third Wednesday in May be Hypertension Awareness Day in North Carolina. For 2015, they hope to expand the event beyond the legislature to include regional activities.

American Heart Association/American Stroke Association
3131 RDU Center Drive, Suite 100, Morrisville, N.C. 27560

Phone: 919-463-8328
www.startwithyourheart.com

Betsy Vetter, Senior Director of Government Relations, American Heart Association
betsy.etter@heart.org

Funding for Success Story was made possible (in part) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for the Collaboration for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (Supporting the Million Hearts® Initiative - American Heart Association, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention). The views expressed in this publications do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.