When will we decide to conquer chronic disease?

Rates of chronic disease among Oregonians, like the rest of the U.S., have been climbing steadily for the past 25 years. More than half of all Oregonians are now living with at least one chronic disease and Oregon Health Authority data predict that more than 1 million Oregonians will suffer from heart disease by 2030.

The American Heart Association predicts that the cost of caring for Americans with heart disease will double in the next 15 years from its present $1 billion per day. If we do not intervene now to reverse this epidemic of decreasing health, the impact will be devastating to our communities, our workforce, our economy and our future.

We’ve all heard messages imploring us to eat better, to exercise more, and to know our blood pressure and cholesterol. But none of this has made any real dent in the rising rates of obesity and diabetes. Why not?

OHSU is an international leader in determining how risk for chronic disease is programmed into our very makeup, and how it is passed down from one generation to the next. This emerging field of research, called the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease, or DOHaD, has shown that the seeds of chronic disease are planted much earlier than we once realized.

Nutrition is the primary driver of chronic disease.

It turns out that the nutrition we received during our time in the womb and during the first two years of life impacted how our organs and bodily systems were built, and programmed our long-term risk for developing chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.

While a mother’s nutritional stores and diet during pregnancy provide nutrition for the developing child, society provides the food environment of the mother. The pace of life has changed over the past two decades and with it so have our diets. Home-cooked meals have been replaced by packaged, processed and fast foods. The result has been successive generations at increased risk for chronic disease.

Now that we understand the cause of our increased chronic disease risk, we must take action to collectively understand how nutrition can serve as a foundation for developing healthy communities.
To create a lasting impact, we must move away from promoting lifestyle changes of individuals to strategies that encourage and support all people to eat well. The Nutrition Oregon Campaign seeks to improve the environments that help or inhibit consumption of nutritious, whole foods. Healthy food environments are created by supportive policies, organizations working to increase healthy food access, knowledgeable leaders who understand the implications of a healthy community and community members who advocate for nutrition for all.

Key sectors
While everyone has a significant role to play, we have identified the following communities of practice to collaborate with in our engagement and education efforts:

We realize that each sector plays a unique role in their community. With this in mind, we worked with leaders from each sector to create messages and calls-to-action specific to their sector. These will be used to excite and engage groups as we work to move the campaign forward.

Oregon Nutrition Campaign Trajectory

Our work is guided by the following values and principles:

- Everyone deserves to start life on an equal footing. This may involve focusing extra attention on communities that are starting at a greater disadvantage.
- Communities cannot access healthy nutrition if their schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and policy makers don’t prioritize healthy choices.
- Chronic disease rates will not decrease until we improve the nutrition levels of infants, adolescents and women of childbearing age.
- Community members best understand the unique barriers to good nutrition that they face. They should be the driving force in developing the vision and interventions to improve nutrition in their own communities.

Goals of Phase 1:

- **Goal 1**: Gain a broad understanding and buy-in of DOHaD concepts among leaders in key sectors.
- **Goal 2**: Develop a statewide shared learning network to increase mutual understanding and self-interest among key stakeholder groups.
- **Goal 3**: Key sector leaders disseminate educational tools and materials throughout their networks.
- **Goal 4**: The Nutrition Oregon Campaign will resemble the cross-sector collaboration we wish to see.
During the fall of 2016, the Nutrition Oregon Campaign project team traveled to six locations across the state to share the science of DOHaD, get a deeper understanding of issues unique to these communities, hear firsthand how they define issues related to access and consumption of nutritious foods, and gather their feedback and reactions to the draft campaign.

We spoke with hundreds of people and organizations through listening tours - designed, facilitated and led by local leaders – and community-wide listening sessions.

Participants saw the potential in the campaign to provide a broader frame and sense of urgency to support their existing work. They also “saw” themselves and their organizations in the work by considering how the campaign could be used to mobilize leaders and support cross-sector work.

We left each community with enthusiastic allies, eager to move forward with the campaign. Overall, it was the excitement, feedback, and great “on the ground” thinking that generated the goals, strategies and approach for phase 1 of the campaign.

By the numbers:

1,978 Miles Traveled
6 Communities Visited
170 Sector Leaders Reached
Help us end chronic disease in Oregon

The Nutrition Oregon Campaign requires an “all hands on deck” approach - we are calling on leaders across Oregon to join us in shifting our focus from a treatment to a prevention model to halt the rise of chronic disease in our communities. With skyrocketing health care costs and widening gaps in poor health outcomes, we must act now to turn this epidemic around. We are looking for leaders, partners and supporters to collaborate with us in this effort.

Help us end chronic disease in Oregon

The planning phase of this project was made possible through generous support from Bobs Red Mill Natural Foods, Oregon Health and Sciences University, and the Ford Family Foundation.

Here’s how you can help!

Read the full plan and try at least one of the calls to action unique to your sector.

Invite us to an event in your community to talk about DOHaD and how you can be involved in the campaign.

Connect us to local change makers.

Attend events convened in local communities.

For more information, contact:

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Join us to end chronic disease where it starts and create a healthier Oregon for all.