

INTERFAITH COMMUNITY SERVICES ***HEALTH ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION FOR CONGREGATIONS***

Ours is a culture that separates body, spirit, and mind, fragmenting our sense of and care of ourselves. People in our society also struggle with high costs and difficult access to health care, with managed health care, and with a fragmented health care system.

Health advocacy and education programs centered in faith communities are a rich opportunity to reconnect faith and health. Congregations can be centers of healing, enhancing “whole person health” for their members and larger communities, reaching people who fall through the cracks. What better places than our houses of prayer and worship to integrate the spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational aspects of personal and communal health?

With this in mind, the staff at Interfaith Community Services is available to assist faith communities start or expand their own health programs, thereby increasing peoples’ access to health advocacy and education and to community resources. This project builds on our award-winning Health Advocacy program, by which we provide advocacy, education, and referrals for people navigating the health care system.

Because the need for these services is greater than our Health Advocacy program can address, we hope to increase programs by:

- Expanding health advocacy and education services within faith communities, helping people gain access to a wide range of health and community resources.
- Encouraging networking among volunteers and leaders working in congregational health advocacy programs.
- Identifying and providing technical assistance to faith communities.

Here is a small sampling of programs that congregations can implement to promote overall health:

- Personal health assessments
- Blood pressure screenings
- Spiritual formation classes
- Visiting those who are sick
- Conflict management workshops
- Services of prayer and healing
- Nutrition classes
- Widow/er support group
- Presentations for caregivers
- Liaison to community resources

Several elements are necessary for the success of a congregation health and wholeness program:

- A theological foundation for the connection of faith and health.
- The support of the clergy/spiritual leaders.
- A health committee to oversee the health advocacy and education work.
- A professional or lay person or team to implement the work.
- An understanding of the congregation’s and/or community’s resources and needs.

ICS looks forward to assisting any congregation in starting or expanding health advocacy and education programs. Interested faith communities can contact Karen MacDonald: 297-2738 ext. 221; kmacdonald@icstucson.org.

Interfaith Community Services, founded in 1985, provides services to seniors, disabled people, and disadvantaged families. We do this with the support of 52 diverse faith communities and more than 600 volunteers. Visit our website at www.icstucson.org.