

Spotlight: John Clymer

[John Anderton] Welcome to another Community Guide spotlight. I'm John Anderton and today we're speaking with John Clymer, a member of the Community Preventive Services Task Force. John serves as the executive director of the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, a nonprofit catalyst for public-private collaboration. John also leads the committee developing the Task Force 2017 Annual Report to Congress. Hi, John. Tell us what motivates you to serve on the Task Force.

[John Clymer] Hi, John. In my belief system, a strong country begins with healthy people and being on this Task Force enables me to play a small role in strengthening communities and families and our country by being part of developing a resource that decision-makers at different levels of government and in the private sector use to help more people be healthier and to do so in efficient ways.

[John Anderton] What do you see as the primary value of evidence-based decision-making?

[John Clymer] Evidence-based decision-making enables decision-makers wherever they may be, whether we're talking about employers, or mayors, or people serving on a local Board of Health; public health officials, governors--whoever the decision-maker is--it enables them to make decisions that are based on knowledge of what's been shown to work. So if they want to prevent infectious diseases they can turn to The Community Guide to find out what works, what's been shown to work. However they're approaching protecting people's health and helping people reach their full potential, they can turn to The Community Guide to enable people and encourage them, empower them, to prevent diabetes or the risk factors for it, or the risk factors that lead to heart disease or stroke, or to prevent injury in motor vehicles or as pedestrians, and workplaces... It's a mother lode of information that decision-makers can use to be able to place fairly sure bets that where they put resources will result in positive outcomes at a reasonable or cost-effective investment.

[John Anderton] So what are the strengths and benefits of the Community Preventive Services Task Force?

[John Clymer] Well, the thing that I'm reminded of constantly, and the Task Force's work, is that we truly adhere to scientific principles. The Task Force, John, is a non-political group; it's non-ideological. We are totally focused on what works, what has already been shown to improve health and prevent disease and injury. So the people who want to accomplish those things in the community, or in their workplace, or somewhere else in this country can make informed choices and be successful in helping more people be healthier.

If you look around the country, John, there places where people live 10 or 12...13 years longer than people live in other parts of the country. By using The Community Guide or Task Force findings, we collectively can help parts of the country where people don't live as long, begin to more closely resemble the places where people live longer. Not that we want every place to be a small town or every place to be a large city or the country but rather, we want every place to be healthy, and to be a place that enables Americans to be healthy and to live to their full potential.

The Community Guide is a resource for that so following these evidence-based findings from The Community Guide will enable decision-makers, policymakers, resource allocators, to do their thing in a way that enables people to...to thrive so that we have greater and more widespread vitality regardless of where people live. They're able to live independently later into life and spend more time with their families or their grandkids or to be more productive in the workplace.

[John Anderton] Has your involvement with The Community Guide had any influence on how you go about your work in public health?

[John Clymer] Absolutely, John. I think about what the evidence tells us works all the time, and The Community Guide helps me keep that top of mind and also is a very rich resource for knowing or being able to quickly find what's been shown to work. One of the groups of people with whom my organization, the National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, works quite a bit is mayors. And one of the things that I really like about working with mayors is that they are focused not so much on ideology or on partisanship, but instead on what works. Mayors are all about getting things done and about helping their communities be strong, be economically vital, and...and be resilient, and be desirable places to live and to raise families and to retire and they, they want to know what's been shown to work, they want to know what's a sure bet because mayors, just like a lot of us at in our families at the kitchen table, we all have limited resources to work with, and so I think all of us want to know if we're responsible for our kids' health, what's been shown to help protect my kid from disease or what's been shown to help my employees, if I'm an employer, be healthier and therefore more productive and have less time away from work. At the community level, mayors are wondering how can we best use public resources, a limited public resource, to get the most bang for the buck, to help the most people be healthy in our community. And The Community Guide is the go to source for them. It's a playbook and it doesn't tell them what to do, it doesn't tell them what they must do, or give them just a limited direction, it gives them a set of choices that they can use to look at their communities priorities and the norms in their community, and the morays and find something that is shown to work to empower people and enable them to take charge of their own health and be healthy and productive and have a relatively sure bet or a high probability bet at least that they're going to get some bang out of the buck.

[John Anderton] Let's take a second and talk about the most recent Annual Report to Congress. Were there any particular topic areas or recommendations that were highlighted?

[John Clymer] Well, this year's Annual Report to Congress, John, focuses on how the Department of Defense and the Armed Forces, the different military services, use evidence-based public health interventions – we're talking about programs, services, policies to support the military, to support Force Readiness. We can't have a strong National Defense if our military members aren't healthy and, in fact we can't have a strong National Defense if the family members of our military personnel aren't healthy. So this is a high priority for the Department of Defense, for the military services, for our nation to use evidence-based approaches to support a healthy Armed Forces and forces who are fit, who are deployable, who are alert, and who are able to do what they've been trained to do in order to protect the US. We know, John, that seven out of ten 18 to 24 year olds in the US today are unable to serve; they're ineligible for military

service for multiple reasons, the first of which is obesity and overweight. So the health of the whole population is vitally important not just to the military, but to the whole country, and to our ability to protect it. And the military, by policy, refers to The Community Guide because they know that if they go there to see what the Task Force findings are, they'll have a high probability method to protect and improve the health and well-being of military members and their dependents and, very importantly, our veterans. The Veterans Affairs Department also uses Community Guide recommendations or Task Force findings to support its commitment to provide for the needs of, and to honor those who have served our nation.

[John Anderton] Thank you very much, John Clymer, for talking to us today about The Community Guide.

[John Clymer] Thank you John

[John Anderton] For more information about The Community Guide or the Community Preventive Services Task Force, visit www.thecommunityguide.org.