

# History of Steps Program

The Steps to a HealthierUS Initiative is an overall effort of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), designed to identify and promote programs that encourage small behavior changes to reduce the burden of chronic disease.

As the nation's oldest and largest health and wellness organization, the YMCA is well positioned to support the Steps Program's efforts to address the nation's growing concerns regarding obesity and other chronic conditions. As a strategic partner, the YMCA lends its facilities, staff, and resources to leverage the public recognition and support of the Steps Program.

The YMCA of the USA was selected as a national partner of the Steps Program in 2004 and awarded \$2 million (\$500,000 per year for four years) to increase the reach of Steps-funded activities. In 2005 and 2006, the YMCA provided mini-grants of \$2,500 to \$35,000 to Steps communities to conduct collaborative projects.

The local STEPS That Count program is sponsored by the South Sound YMCA, YMCA of the USA, the "Steps to a HealthierUS" initiative and the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department "Healthy Steps in Thurston County" project and was specifically designed to make small changes in peoples lives to promote healthier lifestyles

Briggs YMCA Health and Fitness Director, Mike Fouts developed the unique "STEPS That Count" project. In early 2005, Fouts created the program and wrote the grants that have funded the program now in year 4. In his research, Fouts realized that people tended to walk more actively if they had a pedometer to check their daily activity and if they walked with others. That became the genesis of the program, group walking with pedometers. Through this local project, almost 2000 people have participated. STEPS That Count has had walking teams from state agencies, companies, banks/credit unions, churches, schools, and individuals. Many of the past participating teams have now implemented their own walking programs to sustain the healthy lifestyle momentum created by their STEPS experience. In 2007, STEPS That Count participants took 52.8 million steps during the 8-week program. The positive effects of the program are exponential in that they are spread throughout the worksites and the families of those who participate. The STEPS That Count project by the South Sound YMCA is one of the landmark programs in the country. It has been duplicated in many states and has also been recognized nationally by the Chronic Disease Directors in their professional journal.

The YMCA of the USA also actively promotes Steps activities through its many public health initiatives, including YMCA Activate America and to its 20 million members. Working together, the Steps Program and the YMCA aim to make healthy living a reality for millions of Americans.

Take STEPS That Count.