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Overview of the Directors of Health Promotion and Education including history, membership, community partners and efforts to enact policy change for a healthier workforce.

Transcript of video interview produced by the Directors of Health Promotion and Education, 2009.

I'm Rose Marie Matulionis. I'm the executive director of the Directors of Health Promotion and Education. The Directors of Health Promotion and Education represents state directors of health promotion and education programs within state health agencies. That's our primary membership.

Our membership also includes people and organizations that support the directions of prevention programs in states and nationally. Our community partners include academic institutions, voluntary agencies like the Heart Association and the Cancer Society, a diverse group of people that are actually practicing both individual patient education as well as population-based health promotion.

Some of our more interesting members, associate members, include those people that work in the legislatures within each state, and also Congressional representatives nationally.

The organization began in 1946. At that time, it was convened to bring together academic organizations that are teaching health educators with the practice community. So, we really consisted of both the academic and practice community. That was in 1946. Now, as we've progressed and changed through those years, we really right now represent the practice community more than the academic community.

In the 1970s, you saw a lot of government funding of public health. And a lot of the government funding went to strengthen state health agencies and departments of health education. So, you had two things going on. You had government support for infrastructure, and then you also had government support in terms of training the public health workforce to work in health education in public health agencies.

In 1996, a lot of the science was focused around individual behaviors. So, you saw different types of programs that state health departments would convene. Today, a lot of the focus is on population-based health promotion and on policy changes. So, the policies that are implemented by states, communities, local boards of health, departments of education, really have an impact on people's health and on keeping people healthy.

So, you've seen the science grow from a science that really looked at individual behaviors to a science that determines what are effective policies to promote health.

I think I see the future pretty clearly. And I think the future -- part of the future lies in the assessment of health impact of all policies. And I think even states now are beginning to fund policy work themselves.

Most of the policy work has been funded through the CDC, through national organizations. But now state legislatures are beginning to understand that to be competitive in a global market or even in a national market, they need to have a healthy workforce. And they are looking at ways to support that healthy workforce through policy changes in the communities and in health insurance and health reform issues.

So, looking at health impact across policy areas is very different than looking at health policies because there's a growing understanding that all policies have an impact on health, and we need a way to assess that impact before policies are implemented.

The big question is how to assess the impact of policies across the board. And I'm hoping that that will be part of the near future.