

How Henry Ford embraced distance learning for diabetes prevention

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When the pandemic took hold a year ago, in-person diabetes prevention program (DPP) lifestyle change programs across the nation were paused. A month later, some cohorts were able to resume classes through distance learning while others were able to regroup by June 2020. While the transition to distance learning took some time for Henry Ford Health System, they were able to successfully overcome barriers to provide diabetes prevention classes to their participants.

In March 2020, 16 cohorts of the DPP lifestyle change programs were paused, which affected 146 participants. Most cohorts were able to resume virtually while some were blended into new cohorts. From June 2020 until the end of the year, Henry Ford started four new cohorts strictly using distance learning from the beginning. By year end, 185 participants were able to join. The size of each class is dependent on the demand and how many participants need to be placed in classes in their area.

“We had always intended at some point to have some component of distance learning down the road. The COVID-19 crisis definitely accelerated our entry into that,” said Christopher O’Connell, DO, Division Chief of Ambulatory Medicine and Chief Quality and Community Services Officer at Henry Ford Macomb Hospital in Detroit. Henry Ford Health System is an AMA Health System Program Partner.

Here are three ways Henry Ford made distance learning for diabetes prevention work during the pandemic.

Offer support for coaches

“Mentoring and providing support to coaches was our first step as well as recognizing that the coaches were having their own personal crisis related to what was happening in the public health world,” said Jill Yore, RN, MSN, Director of Faith, Community and Health at Henry Ford Macomb

Hospital.

For example, “two of our coaches had to step back because of things that were going on with them personally, so it was really important for us to support them first.”

Acknowledge different skill sets

“We know that more of our community is using digital platforms to stay connected—whether it be with family or health care providers—so for them, moving the class to distance learning was a welcome change,” Yore said.

“On the flip side, there are those who have struggled and needed more mentoring,” she added.

Discover how to successfully offer diabetes prevention at a distance.

Take advantage of family surroundings

Telehealth offers a “window into a person’s home and having other family members present,” said Dr. O’Connell. “For this diabetes prevention program, it’s very challenging if there’s only one person in the family that’s trying to make the changes and everyone else is doing completely different things.”

“Sometimes just by being there and hearing the same message, it makes it easier for the person going through the class because the other family members get a sense of what they’re trying to do,” he said.

Learn more about five barriers to launching a virtual diabetes prevention program.

The AMA’s Diabetes Prevention Guide supports physicians and health care organizations in defining and implementing evidence-based diabetes prevention strategies. This comprehensive and customized approach helps clinical practices and health care organizations identify people with prediabetes and manage the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, including referring people at risk to a National DPP lifestyle change program based on their individual needs.