

NATIONAL DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM LIFESTYLE CHANGE PROGRAM

Strategies for Retaining Participants

The National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) lifestyle change program (LCP) teaches people at risk for type 2 diabetes how to make lasting lifestyle changes—like eating healthier, adding physical activity into their daily routine, and improving coping skills.

The yearlong program provides group support through classes led by Lifestyle Coaches. It is delivered by organizations that use a CDC-approved curriculum and have met all program standards.

But organizations have found that enrolling and retaining participants in the National DPP LCP can be challenging. For example, some people may not be able to get to the classes because of time or transportation constraints. Others may have competing priorities, like family and childcare needs.

To help increase participation in the LCP, CDC funded a project to evaluate retention strategies used by the STRIDES Diabetes Prevention Program in Ohio. STRIDES is offered by the MetroHealth System, which serves the Greater Cleveland area.

Insights from this evaluation could help other organizations that deliver the National DPP LCP retain participants. The main strategies used by the STRIDES program are described below.



The National DPP is a partnership of public and private organizations working together to build a nationwide delivery system for a lifestyle change program proven to prevent or delay onset of type 2 diabetes in adults with prediabetes.

It is led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Retention Strategies Used by the STRIDES Program

Strategy 1: Offer Rolling Enrollment

Rolling enrollment lets participants join at any time during the 1-year program instead of waiting for a new group to begin. The typical format of the LCP is to offer classes weekly for the first 6 months and then at least monthly for the second 6 months. The STRIDES program offers weekly classes for the entire year.

New participants attend an orientation session and then join the class schedule already in progress. They attend classes until they've covered the entire curriculum.

Offering rolling enrollment:

- **Reduces Wait Times.** Participants can start when it works for them, which can enhance their motivation and engagement.
- **Encourages Collaboration.** New participants gain insights from longer-term participants, which can foster a peer learning atmosphere.

Tips for Success

To promote the smooth integration of new participants, LCP delivery organizations can:

- Deliver the program in a way that adds new participants seamlessly, without interrupting the current group's flow.
- Monitor how new participants are adjusting to the group dynamics and how well they are engaging in the program.

Strategy 2: Provide Multiple Class Options

Providing the same class at multiple times each week offers participants flexible scheduling options, which makes it easier for them to attend. The STRIDES program offers multiple class sessions during the week, with opportunities to attend in person or virtually.

Offering multiple class options:

- **Improves Accessibility.** Participants can choose classes that align with their personal and work commitments.
- **Boosts Engagement.** More opportunities to join means that participants are less likely to miss classes, which keeps them engaged and improves retention.
- **Reduces Staffing Challenges.** Lifestyle Coaches who lead the classes can more easily cover different class times because they teach the same class each week.

“Since it’s like a rotating program, you can jump in anywhere. You’re learning a lot from the participants [who] have been through the first part while you’re still going through the first part.” —Participant



Tips for Success

To make it easier for participants to attend classes, LCP delivery organizations can:

- Let participants attend any class that fits their schedule weekly.
- Offer a mix of class options across various days and times.
- Track attendance and collect participant feedback to determine which schedules benefit the most participants. Class times can then be adjusted, if possible.

“[It’s] one of the selling points when I tell people about the class. You don’t even have to commit; whatever works for you. Or we’ll have people that...come late on Tuesday and...come on Thursday...to hear that other part. It’s the same slides. But the discussion is going to be different.” —Program staff

Strategy 3: Offer Special Weigh-In Events

Special weigh-in events can bring participants together to track their progress. The STRIDES program provides a monthly event called Weigh-In Wednesday. People who attend in person are weighed on a calibrated scale, receive in-person coaching, connect with other participants, and receive materials and incentives.

Offering special events:

- **Provides One-on-One Touchpoints.** Monthly weigh-ins offer regular, in-person events that can help keep participants engaged and accountable.
- **Fosters Community.** By providing social interaction and peer support, these events help create a sense of community among participants.
- **Reinforces Commitment and Motivation.** Events that combine weigh-ins with coaching and social interaction are an innovative way to address multiple needs at once, reinforcing commitment and motivation.

Tips for Success

To help participants attend weigh-in events, LCP delivery organizations can:

- Choose locations that participants can get to easily.
- Hold all-day events that allow people to drop in throughout the day.
- Provide educational materials with tips on how to eat healthier, be more physically active, and prevent type 2 diabetes.
- Offer incentives—such as healthy food vouchers, kitchen gadgets, or fitness equipment—to motivate participants to attend in-person weigh-ins. Incentives could help bring in participants who usually attend virtual classes. Incentives can also be used to recognize participants' progress.



“I think STRIDES...[is] good at it. During weigh-ins, they need to be very enthusiastic with people [who] have done well. If you get support and enthusiasm when you go there, and even if you lose a half a pound, it means so much having somebody just write it down when you’re done.” —Participant



Strategy 4: Provide a Tracking App

Making it easy for participants to track their progress can help keep them engaged. The STRIDES program offers participants access to an app called HabitNu to track their food intake, weight, and exercise minutes.

The HabitNu app includes features like direct messaging, discussion boards, and video coaching. These features give participants access to continuous support and resources.

“[We] also access videos that are made available via HabitNu. And that is wonderful to me to be able to go in there and...look at that at any time. I went to a doctor visit one time, and I actually printed out my chart for the weight loss.” —Participant

Tips for Success

To help participants use tracking apps, LCP delivery organizations can:

- Offer training on how to use tracking apps as a regular part of orientation and classes. Training should include all aspects of the app, such as journaling, exercise and weight tracking, posting on discussion boards, and connecting with coaches. Information can be shared through guides, video tutorials, or live demonstrations.
- Encourage participants to set specific goals—like daily journaling or weekly weight tracking—to help them get into the habit of using the app consistently. Clear goals increase the chances that participants will follow the diet and activity guidelines.
- Provide reminders and prompts to help participants maintain their progress.
- Encourage participants to use the app's discussion boards to share their experiences, ask questions, and provide support to peers.
- Use the app's tracking features to monitor participants' progress and give them feedback.

