

County's 20,000 Lives program earns state's top award

By Debra Moore

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The formal presentation will come later, but the official notification came last week: Plumas County's 20,000 Lives program won the top award from the California State Association of Counties — the Innovation Award.

"I was totally shocked," said Mimi Hall, director of the county's public health department, the entity that coordinates 20,000 Lives. "I thought we might be competitive among small counties, but I never expected to win the top award. There were 279 entries."

Those who entered were asked to submit a challenge and then describe the innovative solution used, as well as its originality, cost effectiveness, and its results.

According to the entry, "20,000 Lives is an initiative to improve the quality of life in Plumas County by bringing the entire community together for powerful, lasting change."

It evolved back in 2013 as Public Health faced "the challenge of implementing an ambitious three-year, Community Health Improvement Plan, at a time when both the county and the department lacked funding."

Hall and her team turned to the community. "So many organizations came together," Hall said during an interview following the notification. "The hospitals, the school district, PRS, PCIRC ... we just bring the people together."

Meetings held at locations throughout the county also brought the input of 400 community members.

Originality

What was deemed original about the process was the development of an organization that combined public and private organizations and individuals with just one interest — quality of life. It's also a model that can be replicated by other counties.

Cost effectiveness

No new money was used to launch 20,000 lives. Rather existing funds were used with numerous \$500 mini-grants awarded to various entities and individuals all with the goal of improving quality of life. In the past three years, 81 mini grants totaling \$24,606 were awarded and five \$20,000 grants were given to community-based projects.

Results

Now in its third year the partners are collaborating on a regular basis. "Individuals and small grassroots organizations are now able to join larger partners to accomplish shared goals," Hall said.

Working together, the agency, along with two district hospitals, two nonprofit organizations and the county's First 5 Commission were also able to leverage federal reimbursements to increase access for Medi-Cal recipients.

Hall said that a formal presentation of the award will be made during a board of supervisors meeting in October or November to coordinate with a meeting of 20,000 Lives.

"They deserve the recognition," Hall added.

More information about 20,000 Lives can be found at the countyofplumas.com website under public health. Interested individuals can also subscribe to a weekly e-mailed newsletter.