

**Cameron Bopp, MD**

*Dr. Cameron Bopp used his influence as a community leader to found one of Maine's first Healthy Community Coalitions.*





“If we all band together, we’re much more likely to succeed as a community and everyone will benefit,” says Cameron Bopp, M.D. Guided by this vision, Dr. Bopp established Maine’s first Healthy Community Coalition in Franklin County. An early proponent of community medicine, he recognized the need for citizens to join forces in promoting better health and quality of life. He used his credibility and expertise as a physician and community leader to make Franklin County a model for positive change.

Dr. Bopp traces his concept for the Coalition back to the 1980s when he was an emergency doctor at Franklin Memorial Hospital. In that role and during his term as chairman of the Franklin County Children’s Task Force, he studied issues surrounding child abuse. Through his research, he discovered many causative factors linking child abuse, obesity, cardiovascular disease, alcoholism, and other problems rooted in preventable behaviors. He began to look at all of these issues in the context of broader community concerns.

“So many preventable health issues have common risk factors including low socioeconomic status and poor self-esteem,” says Dr. Bopp. “If we’re really going to have an effect, it will be on a



generation of people supported by the entire community. Ideally, intervention for high-risk groups would start early with prenatal and parenting classes, a good Head Start program, and enrichment programs followed up by comprehensive K–12 health education curriculums. At the same time parents should be getting parallel messages from their doctors, at their work sites and from the media.”

Dr. Bopp assembled a broad base of community stakeholders to develop a unified strategy. He recruited social workers, healthcare professionals, the police chief, school superintendents, and other community leaders to serve as core members of the Coalition. These civic leaders had seen many categorical programs sweep through the community without making much of an impact. In each case, program organizers would start from scratch – spending a year on needs assessment, gathering demographic data, and try-

ing to pull together community support – but there wasn’t enough capacity at the local level to make these programs succeed. Members of the Coalition were determined to learn from these mistakes. They came up with a set of organizing principles that involved sharing data, pooling resources, coordinating grant-getting efforts, identifying supportable programs, and ultimately building a community network.

Dr. Bopp used his skills as a doctor to analyze local health problems and data, to pick best practices that would work well locally and to study International Healthy Cities and other coalition models. By combining the best of many models, ideas and perspectives, Dr. Bopp and his team launched The Healthy Maine Coalition of Franklin County in 1990.



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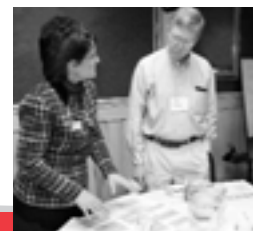
Since that time, Dr. Bopp reports that the Coalition has thrived. “We have a full-time staff, we bring in a lot of grant money, we network well within the community, and we conduct many innovative programs that make a real difference. We also succeeded in getting public health on the agenda of Franklin Memorial Hospital, one of the most important institutions in the area,” he says. Franklin County now has significant capacity when compared with other rural communities in the state. As a result, many Coalition projects become self-sufficient since there are factions



in place to run them. Another key to the Coalition’s success is Dr. Bopp’s adherence to Continued Quality Improvement, a technique for measuring, remeasuring, and continuously refining your processes on the basis of your data.

“The Coalition’s greatest success is helping give Franklin County a ‘can-do’ attitude when it comes to identifying and solving our own problems, and every time we have a success, the networks and relationships that we’ve built help the next task succeed,” says Dr. Bopp.

Several communities in Maine have followed Franklin County’s lead and started their own Healthy Community Coalitions. For those considering taking this step, Dr. Bopp offers some basic advice. “Read the literature, go to national conferences to hear what the experts in the field are saying, and look for the best practices. Make sure there is support for what you want to do, think big, and build a good team that’s broad-based and has a lot of perspective. It’s just perseverance after that.”



**The Coalition  
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(pages 55 and 56).**