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Successful Pivot of a Community Exercise Program to Virtual During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background

Heart to Start (H2S) was developed by the Providence Heart Institute to create positive community connections and sustainable exercise habits. It is a free 12-week program that began in 2012 in Portland, OR, and subsequently expanded to 6 Pacific Northwest locations. Participants train together for a walking or running 5K goal event. During the global COVID-19 pandemic, H2S pivoted to a virtual program.

Methods

- Pre-pandemic, the program included one weekly in-person training day, with track-side community expert conversations, and 3 days of self-led training.
- Virtual H2S included a weekly podcast with community experts on topics including nutrition, sports medicine, proper footwear, and mental mindset. 5K and 10K training plans were provided.

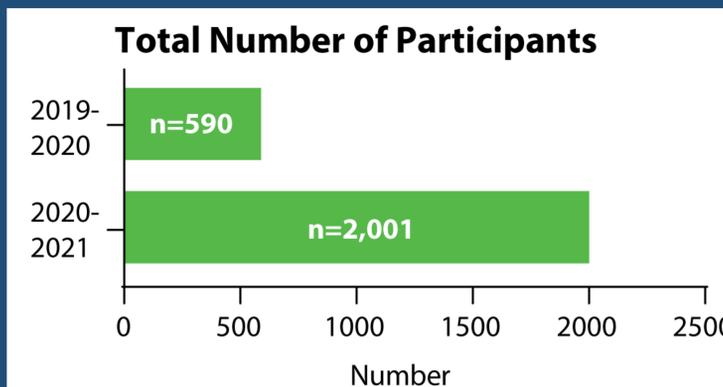
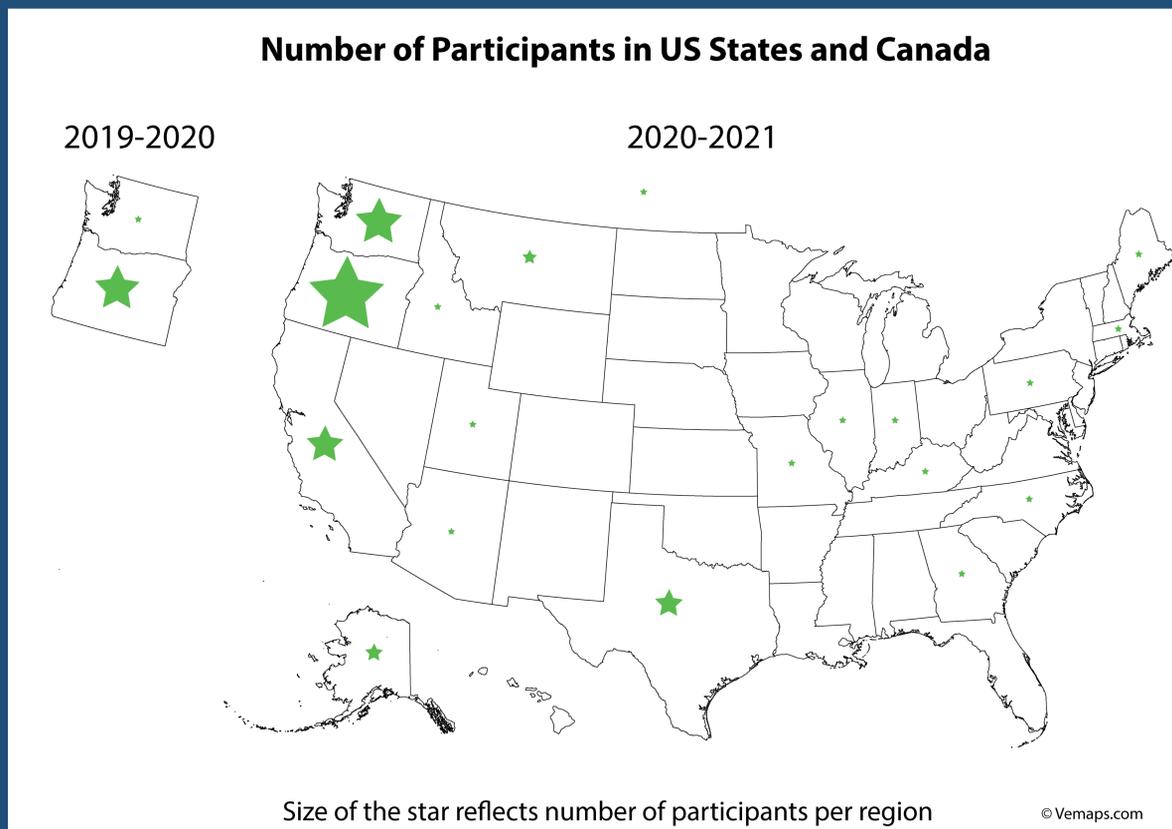
Results

- With the pivot to virtual, the geographic reach of H2S grew from 2 states in 2019-2020 to 18 states and 2 countries in 2020-2021 (Central Figure top).
- Registration increased 240% (Central Figure bottom), with 79% first-time participants and 59% health system employees (Figure 1).
- Participant training included running, walking, cycling, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing.
- There was a decrease in registration for the goal event (Figure 2); however, some participants completed their goal without formally registering for the event.
- Survey feedback indicated that participants would like the virtual option to continue, as it allowed for more flexibility, and would like to connect with local participants.

Conclusions

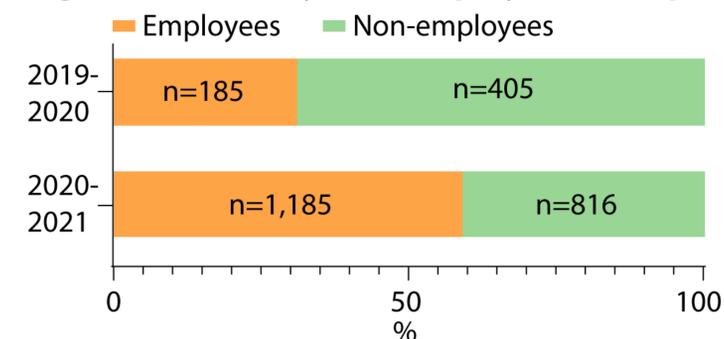
- The transition of H2S to a virtual program during the COVID-19 pandemic increased participation and geographic reach, with a reduction in goal event registration.
- Moving forward, H2S will continue offering both virtual and in-person training, encouraging multiple training modalities, and flexibility in the goal event to best serve a larger community of participants.

Virtual shift brings 240% growth, expanding from two states to 18 states and two countries.



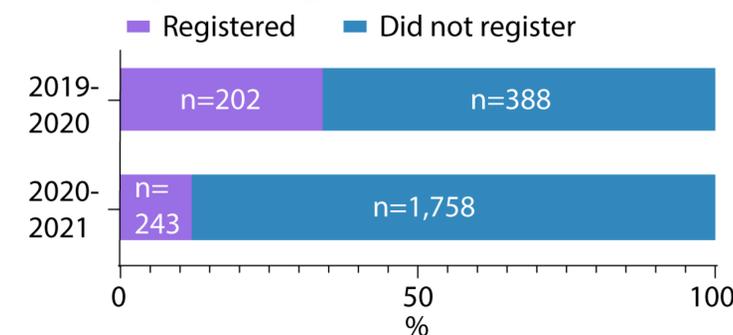
This was excellent for me emotionally and physically... It also encouraged me to stay connected.

Figure 1: Health System Employee Participants



When I started, I could hardly walk 2 blocks without being short of breath and now I'm regularly walking 3 miles, 4-5x a week.

Figure 2: Registration for Goal Event



I did a 10k and hadn't run that far in 5 years... this group [helped] me do it... thanks for the motivation.

United States Map by Vemaps.com

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Disclosures: None