

# BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD

2013

**Advances in Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Management  
Award Winner – Tracy Hussey, Hamilton Family Health Team**

## Improving Health by Tackling Obesity



Obesity is often a multi-generational problem for families, which makes a family health team a natural choice for tackling it. Tracy Hussey, nutrition services manager, has been leading the Hamilton Family Health Team in doing that since 2000. The Hamilton team has developed two programs for treating obesity — **Healthy You**, a group program aimed at adults, and **Healthy Futures**, for obese children.

Managing obesity is the cornerstone of preventing and managing chronic disease. There are thousands of studies clearly showing that weight loss prevents and treats diabetes, hypertension, and dyslipidemia. *Healthy You* is aimed at adults with chronic diseases and those at risk of developing them. It focuses on positive, healthy living because even modest weight loss lowers the need for medication for high blood pressure, hyperglycemia and cholesterol and helps patients meet their health targets. Overweight patients who do not yet have diabetes, hypertension and dyslipidemia have an excellent chance of preventing their onset. *Healthy You* is a better choice for both groups for many reasons: commercial weight loss programs can be expensive and many focus on very low calorie diets, without promoting behaviour changes and physical activity. It adds up to greater likelihood of regaining weight, without building fitness. *Healthy You* emphasizes exercise and has been proven to be effective.

*Healthy Futures* is still being developed, but essentially modifies *Healthy You* for the complex issues of pediatric obesity. Often the parents of obese children are overweight as well, so the intervention has to focus on the whole family's food behaviour. To do that, *Healthy You* is offered to parents, in the hope the changes they make will affect the whole family.

Hamilton shares its material on both *Healthy You* and *Healthy Futures* with any family health team that asks for it; after more than a decade of work, *Healthy You* has been shown to be an excellent, reproducible model for chronic-disease management.