

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Comprehensive Health Assessment to Develop Improvement Plan for Kent County

Over the past several months, **more than 80 partners**, including the area's major hospitals, mental health providers, community aid foundations and the Kent County Health Department have been working to collect data for a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). The results will be used to formulate a "Community Health Improvement Plan."

Community input included 12 focus groups with nearly 120 participants, and 395 Intercept Interviews. The input came from a racially and ethnically diverse group of individuals from throughout Kent County, with a broad range of life experiences and economic backgrounds. Attached, you will find the Community Health Profile Report based on the assessment. "The health needs assessment represents an important starting point for community service organizations to collaborate and address regional health issues," said Mishelle Bakewell, Director of Community Outreach for Metro Health. "By working together, we can provide the greatest benefit for our community."

The CHNA found more than 40 issues that residents want addressed, and the CHNA Steering Committee narrowed that list to the Top 5 Strategic Priorities:

- Increase the proportion of community members, including the uninsured and working poor, who have access to affordable healthcare.
- Increase the number of providers available that accept Medicaid or offer low-cost/free services.
- Reduce disparities in adequacy of prenatal care.
- Increase healthy eating by ensuring access to healthy foods.
- Reduce the disparity in health risk factors and protective factors between students.

"The assessment provides valuable and useful information," said Dr. Erin Inman, director, Spectrum Health Healthier Communities. "The data provides a level foundation on which to plan, develop and implement new programs and services to meet the needs of our community."

Coalition leaders will immediately begin engaging the community in developing strategies to address the issues. “We will work with a variety of groups,” says Cathy Raevsky, Administrative Health Officer for the Kent County Health Department. “Several have an already-proven track record in delivering results, but we need to fill the gaps where some clients are not getting the care they need.”

“We are proud to be a partner in this collaborative work to improve the health of Kent County,” said Deanna Demory, from the Heart of West Michigan United Way. “As we focus on strategic issues, our Health Vision Council will use this as a foundation for prioritizing our resources – including volunteer and advocacy efforts, as well as the community’s donations.”

Developing a long-term, systemic approach on these issues could have a broad impact on quality of life. Issues that were raised in CHNA report coincide with the goals set forth in the recently-awarded Community Transformation Implementation Plan for Kent County. In September, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded a \$1 million grant over the next three years to tackle chronic diseases, promote healthier lifestyles, reduce health disparities and control health care spending. "We are looking forward to the collaboration that this project has brought forth, as the need in our community deserves to have everyone's support and effort to resolve the issues at hand," said Brad Mathis, Director of Saint Mary's Community Benefit Outreach.