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Comprehensive Community Health Improvement Plan for Kent County

GRAND RAPIDS - One year after developing top strategic health priorities with an extensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), plans are in the works to create a healthier Kent County. The Community Health Improvement Plan lists strategies that Kent County will use to tackle key health issues, as well as goals that will help the community measure whether or not these strategies are successful. Health improvements included in this plan range from improving access to equitable healthcare to increasing availability of healthy foods for all Kent County residents.

Coalition leaders worked with a variety of groups over the past year, determining how to reach all residents and eliminate barriers to better health. "We invited everyone to the table who may be able to help address these critical issues," said Cathy Raeveky, Administrative Health Officer for the Kent County Health Department. "Many organizations that took part in the plan development have experience and success in delivering results." Nearly 100 organizations were involved in the creation of the plan, which is available at www.kentcountychna.org.

"Everyone has a stake in a healthier Kent County," said Steve Heacock, Senior Vice President of Spectrum Health. "Having community leaders and health care providers working together to provide expertise and perspective will hopefully result in better access to health care and social services for our at-risk community members."

"Broader than any singular hospital or organization, the priorities identified in the Community Health Needs Assessment are community challenges, requiring a community-based approach," said Brad Mathis, Director of Community Benefit Integration at Saint Mary's Health Care. "As a leader in community health, Saint Mary's Health Care is proud to facilitate these coordinated efforts alongside so many other highly regarded organizations."

"Everyone benefits from a healthier community. Children can learn better in school. Fewer people have to manage chronic health conditions. Employers have healthier employees. We all win." said Mishelle Bakewell, Community Outreach Director at Metro Health. "We're excited to work with our community partners and community members to make West Michigan a healthy place to live."

Below, the strategic priorities are listed, along with the goals set to improve the collective health of Kent County. (Please note: Priorities 1 & 2 were closely related and have been merged to form one combined Priority.)

1. Increase the proportion of community members, including the uninsured and working poor, who have access to affordable healthcare.

2. Increase the number of providers available that accept Medicaid or offer low-cost/free services:

- Ensure community members have access to primary and specialty healthcare.
- Ensure community members have access to dental healthcare.
- Ensure community members have access to behavioral healthcare.
- Ensure appropriate, timely, well-coordinated access to a continuum of health and social services.

3. Reduce disparities in adequacy of prenatal care:

- Ensure all women receive prenatal care in the first trimester.
- Ensure all women receive an adequate number of prenatal care visits.
- Reduce disparities in the provision of prenatal care.

4. Increase healthy eating by ensuring access to healthy foods:

- Ensure healthy foods are available, accessible, and affordable.
- Increase healthy eating within Kent County.

5. Reduce the disparity in health risk factors and protective factors between students:

- Coordinate and improve the collection of demographically representative data related to health risk and protective factors to identify current disparities.
- Engage and empower youth to reduce disparities in risk and protective factors.

Several agencies are already getting to work on attaining these goals. “We can’t have any kind of collective impact until we agree to work together on the most important issues,” said Deanna Demory, Director of Community Impact – Health, of the Heart of West Michigan United Way. “United Way’s resources, including both our community’s funds and volunteers, will join with other countywide efforts to help support the goals and strategies outlined. In fact, sometimes it seems we compete for causes, creating less than effective systems support. Those who support United Way expect this type of collaboration.”

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