

Recommendations
of the
Saint Paul – Ramsey County
Community Health Services Advisory Committee

June 2006

The Saint Paul – Ramsey County Community Health Services Advisory Committee (CHSAC) advises the Mayor, City Council and County Board on issues related to public health as defined in the Joint Powers Agreement approved by both local governments in December 1996.

For the past seven months the work of the committee has been focused on the health of children and their families. Topics discussed included: disparities in infant mortality rates, Child and Teen Checkups (CTC), adolescent parenting, healthy families home visiting, prevention of teenage pregnancies, sexual violence and teen pregnancy, Mind the Gap Report, and STEPS to a Healthier Saint Paul.

Based on the presentations by staff and other experts and discussions by the Committee members, the following recommendations are for your consideration and action.

Recommendation #1 – Promote the health and well being of teen parents and their children by emphasizing the importance of research-based, coordinated services that are accessible to all pregnant and parenting teens. Support the continuation of the Public Health Teen Parent Program that works in conjunction with Ramsey County Departments of Human Services and Workforce Solutions, along with schools, and community agencies to reach the following goals:

- promote teen and child health
- promote effective parent-child interaction and attachment, and positive parenting skills
- promote healthy child spacing and prevention of subsequent teen pregnancies
- promote high school graduation or GED completion to increase the long-term self-sufficiency potential of pregnant and/or parenting teens

Challenge/Opportunity - Children born to teen mothers are more likely to experience: lower birth weights and related health problems, inadequate parenting, abuse and neglect, and poor school performance. More than 70% of teen parents receive TANF assistance. Over 50% of families receiving MFIP began with a birth to a teen mother. Females whose highest education level was grades 9-11 earn 27% less than females with a high school diploma or GED.

The Ramsey County program has achieved success in the following areas:

- enrollment of teens and their children in health insurance programs
- increasing the percentage of vaccinated children and well-child examinations
- promoting child-spacing and reducing additional births to teens

Recommendation #2 – Reduce the disparities between races, income groups and places by implementing recommendations contained in the Mind the Gap/Close the Gap reports and additional recommendations created by County Departments and study groups. Promote the dissemination of the information contained in the reports throughout the City and County. Maintain the “safety net” provided by government services.

Challenge/Opportunity - Saint Paul and Ramsey County have a number of health assets that work toward reducing the disparities gap. The assets include: access to health care supported by local tax dollars; Block Grant funding of four community clinics; provision of services to indigent residents of Ramsey County provided at Regions Hospital; excellent response times by local emergency medical service providers; and special services, including family planning, immunizations, and infectious disease control provided by the Department. The City and County also have an excellent array of health clinics that provide services in several languages to serve a large non-English speaking population.

However, within Ramsey County, disparities in health outcomes due to race, income groups, and place continue to exist. Examples include:

- Infant mortality rates are double for African-American and triple for Native Americans as compared to Caucasians.
- High School graduation rates are significantly lower for teenage mothers.
- Lead poisoning is far more common among families living in older homes.
- Asthma rates are significantly higher for persons living along heavily traveled interstate highways.

Recommendation #3 - Encourage healthy lifestyles among all citizens by promoting awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles, and empower, provide support and encouragement for residents to incorporate healthy eating and active living into their lives. This can be accomplished by implementing chronic disease prevention efforts focused on reducing the burden of diabetes, overweight, obesity, and asthma and addressing the related risk factors - physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

Challenge/Opportunity – Chronic diseases are complex and multi-factorial, involving environmental, social, cultural, genetic, physiologic, metabolic, behavioral and psychological components. Chronic diseases account for most of the leading causes of death, account for a large portion of chronic disability, and put a large economic burden on society in general and the health care system specifically. While some of the components of chronic disease are not modifiable, there are behavioral components such as increased physical activity and healthy nutrition, and environmental changes such as access to walking paths, etc. that do impact the course of many chronic diseases.

A recent residential survey revealed that perceived personnel safety, heavy traffic flow and lack of suburban sidewalks are key constraints on outdoor recreational activities.

The challenge is for the County and the Public Health Department to find ways to support and sustain current health promotion efforts such as Steps to a Healthier St Paul and Active Living Ramsey County through partnerships, collaborations, and coalitions with and within the community.

Recommendation #4 – Assure smoke-free food and beverage establishments throughout Ramsey County by amending the Smoke-Free Restaurant Ordinance. The County Board should join the City of Saint Paul in making all food and beverage establishments smoke-free throughout Ramsey County.

Challenge/Opportunity – Secondhand tobacco smoke is the third leading cause of preventable death in the United States following smoking and alcohol abuse. The financial and social costs of tobacco use are a burden shared by all county residents via increased cost of private health care, public care programs and property loss. Smoke-free policies remain the only measure to truly ensure that employees and customers are adequately protected from the dangers of secondhand smoke.

Recommendation #5 – Prevent sexual violence and teen pregnancy by affirming and supporting evidence-based prevention initiatives by the Saint Paul - Ramsey County Department of Public Health. Collaborate with community partners to better understand and address root causes of key issues affecting the health, safety and well being of our youth and community, in particular, sexual violence and teen pregnancy.

Challenge/Opportunity - A primary way in which the City and County can act to prevent sexual violence and teen pregnancy is this:

- Ensure that all City and County staff that provide services and interact with adolescents receives training in healthy youth development and Teen Wakanheza. Teen Wakanheza is a new initiative of the public health department to help adults (individuals and organizations) create positive environments and interactions with youth through which teens feel cared about, valued and respected.
- Seek multiple opportunities and community partnerships to provide the Teen Wakanheza training for organizations throughout the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County.
- Provide parenting supports and appreciation for City and County staff who are parents of adolescents.