

# 2004 STRATEGIC PLAN



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December, 2003

To the Kent County Board of Commissioners,  
and to the Citizens of Kent County:

It goes almost without saying that the world we live in today is vastly different from the world we inhabited just a few short years ago. As individuals and as a community, we may notice changes in the way we think, what we do, and how we see ourselves – both in response to, and in anticipation of, the changes around us.

For the Kent County Health Department, our changing world represents not only a reaffirmation of the importance of what we do, but an opportunity to grow. As an agency serving the community, our ability to adapt, to transform, and to innovate can have a profound impact on the health and safety of our community, and the individuals within it.

For those reasons the Kent County Health Department has undertaken a dynamic and comprehensive strategic planning process. For more than a year, through focus groups, work groups, staff surveys, and retreats, input was sought – and taken – from every level of the Health Department. Additionally, in order to assure that the results of this process reflected both the interests and priorities of our community, our community partners -- in the form of the Community Health Advisory Committee -- provided valuable insight and input into this plan.

The result, both a vision and a plan for realizing it, focuses on five areas vital to enhancing community health: child and family health, community environment, disease prevention, surveillance, and organizational health. This strategic plan represents not a departure from public health principles but a realignment and refocusing of public health practice in Kent County; an acknowledgment of the changing role of local public health agencies in a changing world.

It is my pleasure to present the Kent County Health Department's 2004 Strategic Plan.

In good health,



Cathy Raevsky  
Administrative Health Officer



## OUR PUBLIC HEALTH MISSION

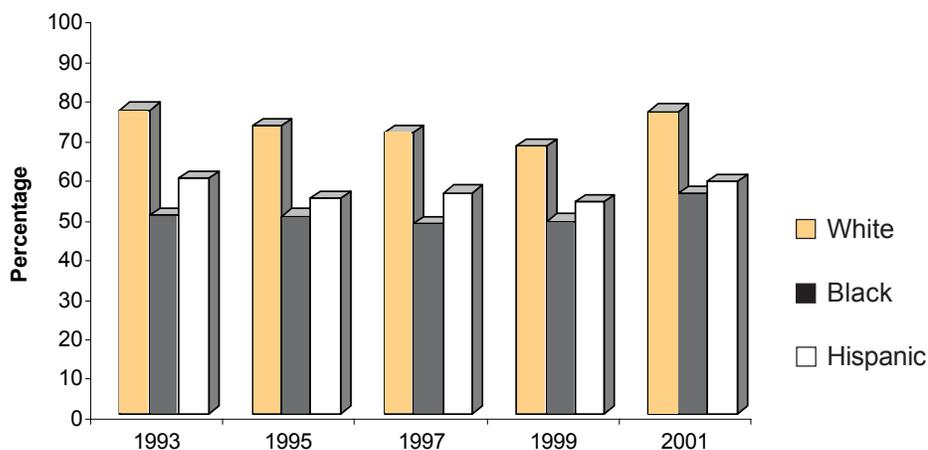
The Kent County Health Department shall be responsive to the community health needs of the citizens of Kent County by continually and diligently endeavoring to prevent disease, prolong life, and promote the public health.

# CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH

Providing families with the resources they need to be healthy is both a priority and a challenge. Adequate health care helps people to live longer, healthier lives. Unfortunately, not everyone in our community has access to the care they need, and disparities in health status persist in our community. By helping to assure that everyone in the community has access to prenatal care, good nutrition, and lifesaving childhood immunizations, we seek to help children be healthy, be ready for school, and grow into healthy adults.

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**Rates of adequate prenatal care by race/ethnicity, Kent County, 1993-2001**



## LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS HELP ASSURE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The U.S. public health system -- a collaborative network of federal, state, and local public health agencies -- is among the best in the world. The local public health department is responsible for delivering the majority of public health services in the community. It is at the local level that federal and state

resources are transformed into public health workers that provide critical health services to the residents of Kent County.

The Kent County Health Department administers federal, state, and local dollars to provide programs and services that protect and enhance the health of Kent County citizens. These



The keys to healthy children and their families are healthy lifestyles, optimal family functioning, and access to appropriate health care.

**Strategy:** Provide services that promote healthy pregnant women, infants and children and their overall family functioning.

<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
1. Provide services that support healthy family functioning.	▶ Reduced factors that impair family functioning, such as child abuse, domestic violence and substance abuse.
2. Reduce infant and childhood mortality and morbidity in Kent County.	▶ Infant mortality rate at or below state average; ▶ Reduced disparities in minority and white infant mortality rates; ▶ Preventable illnesses, injuries and deaths in children reduced or eliminated.
3. Improve access to health care.	▶ Reduced barriers to care such as cultural insensitivity, lack of transportation, and no or limited insurance.
4. Promote prenatal health.	▶ Reduced rate of low birthweight deliveries; ▶ Increased number of women entering prenatal care during first trimester of pregnancy.
5. Promote childhood immunizations.	▶ Increased immunization rates for infants and children.
6. Promote optimum nutrition for pregnant women, infants and children.	▶ Increased breastfeeding rates; ▶ Reduced adult and childhood obesity; ▶ Increased availability of healthier food and beverage choices in school cafeterias.
7. Reduce lead poisoning.	▶ Increased number of lead-free homes and decreased number of incidences of lead poisoning.
8. Children are ready for school.	▶ Ninety-eight percent of children will have up-to-date immunizations and hearing and vision screenings prior to entering kindergarten; ▶ Increased promotion of literacy activities.



programs include public health clinics that deliver clinical health screenings and prevention services; well and septic system evaluations to reduce hazards in the environment; visits to pregnant women and young children in their homes to build strong healthy families; health education classes to teach people how to reduce their risk of disease; and the investigation and control of tuberculosis and other diseases in the community.

This is how public dollars are translated into public services that prevent disease, prolong life, and promote community health; this is the business of local public health departments.

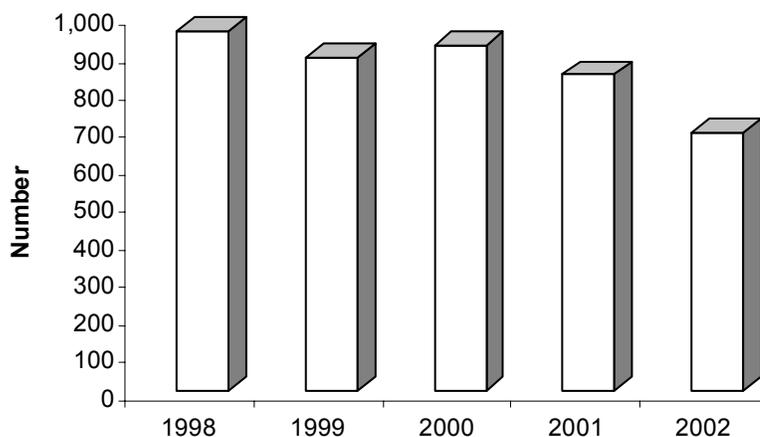
The Kent County Health Department pursues these responsibilities with the utmost sense of purpose. Our commitment is not just to the community at large, but to every individual within it.

# COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

For our community to be truly healthy, we must consider the health of the environment – air, water, and land — the quality of physical surroundings, and their potential impact on health and well being. The community environment is perhaps the one thing we all have in common. While Kent County provides a mix of natural beauty and contemporary cityscape, not everyone enjoys a healthy physical environment. Air quality has historically been lower in urban areas, where a mix of older housing, manufacturing and other industry pose an increased risk of human health hazards. In addition, food safety is receiving increased attention as food-borne illnesses have increased, and food and water supplies are increasingly recognized as potential targets of terrorist activity. Finally, a healthy community environment is one which fosters the safe cohabitation of humans and animals.

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**Reported dog bites, Kent County, 1998-2002**



## **KENT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT: A PROUD TRADITION OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

The first record of a public health act in Kent County was the inoculation of some 150 Native Americans by Dr. Charles Shepard in October 1835. Though the specific purpose of these immunizations has been lost to history (though one may guess, given the fact that there was only one type of inoculation given

in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, that the inoculations were for smallpox), protecting the health of the community has always been the guiding principle of local public health efforts. Reviewing the history of public health in Kent County shows how far these efforts have taken us.



Community Environment

It is important that our community environment be safe from hazards. Investigations, regulatory oversight and community involvement regarding food safety, sanitation, water, air, land use, and animal advocacy support this effort.

**Strategy:** Ensure community health and safety through investigations, education, consultation and support.

**Initiatives**

**Outcomes**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Promote food safety.   | ▶ Decline in reported food-borne illnesses and reduced number of critical violations cited.                               |
| 2. Promote sanitation.  | ▶ Reduced public health nuisance complaints, and decreased incidence of sanitation-related communicable diseases.         |
| 3. Promote improved surface and groundwater protection strategies.      | ▶ Less contaminated surface and ground water.   |
| 4. Promote animal advocacy.   | ▶ Increase in animals licensed;<br>▶ Reduced animal cruelty and neglect;<br>▶ Increased adoptions and reduced euthanasia. |
| 5. Apply public health criteria to land-use and urban design decisions. | ▶ Incorporation of general public health criteria in land-use and design.   |
| 6. Promote air quality education activities.                            | ▶ Reduced incidence of respiratory illness due to radon and tobacco smoke.  |

The first record of public sanitation activities was in 1849 when the Grand Rapids village council ordered 200 barrels of lime to be spread over the village streets to prevent health hazards from “primitive facilities and indifferent ways.” The organization of the first public health authority in Grand Rapids took place 16 years later, in 1877, when the Council convened a local board of health “for the protection of its citizens.”

In 1915 the first Kent County health authority began to take shape with the hiring of the first County school nurse. The Kent County Health Department was officially born in January 1931 with the passage of state legislation that allowed counties to organize health departments. For the next 36 years, there would be two public health departments in Kent County.

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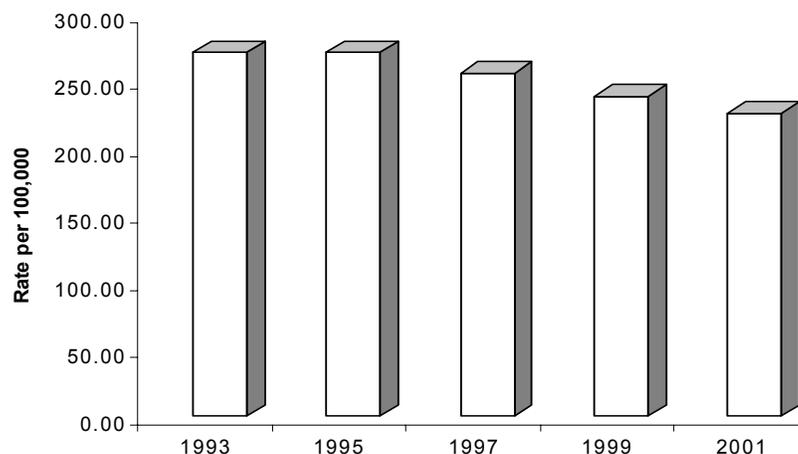
# DISEASE PREVENTION

Although health department programs are designed to help reduce illness and prolong life, people continue to die prematurely from causes which are largely preventable. Chronic diseases, which include heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke, account for nearly three-quarters of the deaths in Kent County. Although the risk for some chronic diseases is increased through heredity, most are the result of unhealthy lifestyle choices.

Communicable diseases – including sexually transmitted infections – can be reduced through timely screening, appropriate counseling and education, and individual behavior change. Successful control of both chronic and communicable disease requires ongoing assessment of community health risks, and the development of policies to address those risks through targeted interventions and efficient organization of public health resources.

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**Kent County age-adjusted mortality rate from heart disease, 1993-2001**



*(continued from preceding page)* The City of Grand Rapids secured its place in public health history in 1945 when it became the first city in the United States -- and the world -- to add fluoride to its public water supply to reduce tooth decay and cavities. The results of the 'Grand Rapids Study' were undeniable, and today water fluoridation is regarded as one of the leading public health accomplishments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1954, the governments of the City of Grand Rapids and Kent County agreed to work together toward the development of a single health department with jurisdiction over all of Kent County. Combining the departments required more space, and in 1965, the Health Department moved from downtown Grand Rapids to a former juvenile home on Walker Road N.W., which would be its home for the next decade. The consolidation of the City of



Chronic and communicable diseases impair our quality of life. Identifying major diseases affecting people in our community will allow targeted education and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

**Strategy:** Promote health choices that will reduce disease and disabilities that impair the quality of life.

**Initiatives**

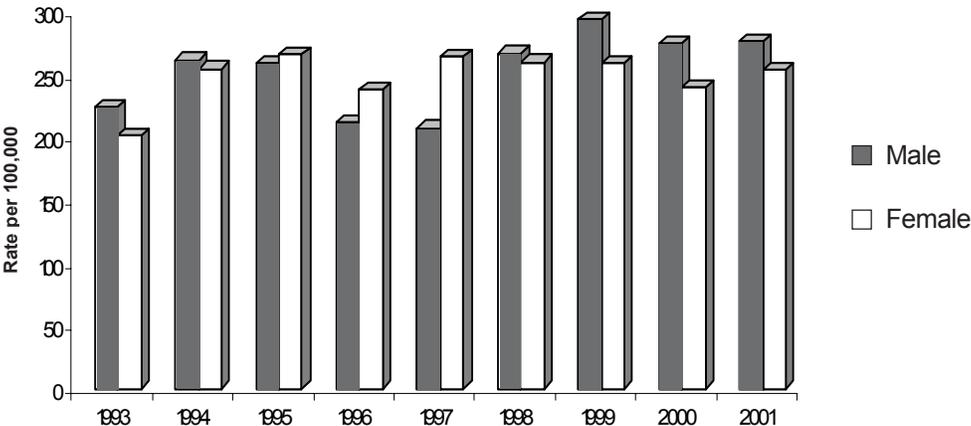
- 1. Improve communicable disease services.
- 2. Promote lifestyle choices and environmental change through education to reduce chronic diseases.

**Outcomes**

- ▶ Timely reporting from health care providers;
- ▶ Reduction in number of reported communicable diseases.
- ▶ Decline in incidence of chronic disease and morbidity and mortality rates.



**Reported cases of gonorrhea by sex, Kent County, 1993-2001**



Grand Rapids and Kent County public health departments was completed in 1967.

In 1979, the Health Department moved to a newly-constructed public health facility on Fuller Avenue N.E., its current location. As the Kent County Health Department emerged as a leading regional public health resource, state and local leaders secured

funding for a 10,000 square foot, state-of-the-art public health laboratory that was added to the Health Department building in 1990.

A reorganization of public health services in 1993 consolidated some 30 satellite WIC, well child, and public health nurse clinics into six full-service community (*continued next page*)

# PUBLIC HEALTH SURVEILLANCE

Preventing and controlling infectious disease is a critical aspect of assuring community health, and is a core function of local health departments. Accurate and timely reporting of communicable diseases is critical to their control and can mean the difference between a localized 'cluster' of cases and a wide-spread outbreak that can affect hundreds or thousands of people.

Public health departments are increasingly recognized as front-line responders to health threats. Zoonotic diseases -- those that are carried by animals but are infectious to humans -- account for 60% of known human infectious diseases, meaning that surveillance activities must focus on both human and non-human disease outbreaks. In addition, diligent and vigorous surveillance allows the health department to identify potential covert and intentional threats to community health as they emerge, and to mount an effective, timely, and appropriate response.

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## Infectious organisms pathogenic to humans, and percentage that are zoonotic\*

Type of Pathogen		# Zoonotic (%)
Viruses and prions	217	165 (76%)
Bacteria and rickettsia	538	269 (50%)
Fungi	307	113 (65%)
Protozoa	66	43 (65%)
Helminths	287	278 (97%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,415</b>	<b>868 (61%)</b>

\* Zoonotic diseases, or zoonoses, are diseases and infections which are naturally transmitted between vertebrate animals and humans.

(continued from preceding page) Public Health Clinics. In 2001, the administrative structure of the Health Department was reorganized. The Public Health Director position was divided into two positions: an Administrative Health Officer and a Medical Director. Instead of reporting to a Board of Health, the Administrative Health Officer was to report directly to the County Administrator. Cathy Raevsky was hired as Administrative Health

Officer in 2001, and Dr. Mark Hall was hired as Medical Director in 2003. Today the Kent County Health Department employs more than 300 public health professionals and is considered one of the leading local public health departments in the State of Michigan. This strategic plan represents a year-long effort under its new administration to clarify and focus the strategic direction of the Health Department.



Data and our response to it are critical factors in the way we address health issues in our community. By enhancing and analyzing the information collected we will be better prepared to respond to community health needs.

**Strategy:** Collect, analyze and monitor key indicators of community health and develop response options.

**Initiatives**

**Outcomes**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use of database information to supplement investigative disease control functions.</li> <li>2. Enhance ability to respond to natural disasters, unusual occurrences, bioterrorism, and threats to the community.</li> <li>3. Define community health indicators.</li> <li>4. Maintain alert system.</li> <li>5. Utilize surveillance systems.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Enhanced utilization of existing databases.</li> <li>▶ Completed Emergency Response Plan (ERP), trained staff, equipment and resources to respond to incidents.</li> <li>▶ Published reports on the status of public health in Kent County in collaboration with community partners.</li> <li>▶ Immediate dissemination of information to staff and community providers.</li> <li>▶ Appropriate incident response.</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

**STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW**

Strategic planning at the Kent County Health Department began in April, 2002, with the selection of Innovations in Management, LLC, to facilitate the strategic planning process. Because the optimal outcome of any strategic planning process is a shared organizational vision manifest in a plan of action, input from

staff at all levels of the organization was critical.

During the spring and early summer 2002, more than a dozen focus groups were conducted with staff and management -- including one with the Community Health Advisory Committee -- to gather broad input on (*continued next page*)

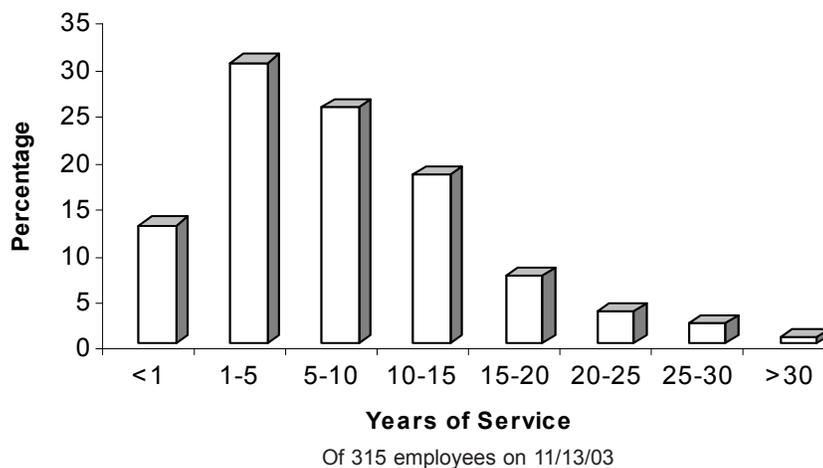
# ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

All health department programs share a singular goal: to prevent disease by promoting health. Whether through personal clinical services, education to change behaviors, or environmental mitigation, health department staff are proud to provide a multifaceted continuum of public health prevention services. Although the U.S. median tenure for all jobs is 3.7 years, 57% of Health Department employees have remained for five or more years, and over 30% for 10 or more years. Such above-average longevity builds expertise among staff and adds quality and value to the public health services delivered to our community.

As the Kent County community grows increasingly diverse, there is an increased need for racial and ethnic diversity and cultural sensitivity within the health department work force. In order for the health department to continue to do its job effectively, it must have qualified, well-trained, diverse staff who are committed to assuring the overall health of the community.

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**Employee longevity, Kent County Health Department**



(continued from preceding page) organizational structure and processes, interdepartmental and community linkages, and related service delivery issues. Using a technique called “story boarding,” staff were asked to identify perceived organizational strengths and weaknesses, and to assess the Health Department’s current and future role in the broader community.

The strategic planning process was slowed somewhat during late 2002 when the federal smallpox vaccination initiative required a substantial diversion of both staff and management resources. This exercise, which demonstrated the ability of the Health Department to respond rapidly to emerging issues, was brief and temporary, and the planning process resumed in early 2003.



## Organizational Health

Our people are our greatest asset. To maintain and attract a talented, diverse workforce, we are committed to regular and effective communication, promotion of teamwork, and professional development of staff.

**Strategy:** Strive to be an Employer of Choice by promoting teamwork, open and honest communication, and professional development of staff.

### Initiatives

1. Improve communication.

2. Improve staff morale.

3. Increase and improve teamwork.

4. Improve workforce diversity.

### Outcomes

▶ Improvement shown on employee satisfaction surveys and general employee feedback.

▶ Improvement shown on staff assessment survey;  
▶ Turnover lower than community and industry standards resulting in increased average tenure.

▶ Improved rating on employee satisfaction and client satisfaction surveys, evaluation of teamwork effectiveness from Senior Leadership Team and supervisory staff.

▶ Positive minority hiring statistics, increased Kent County Health Department minority population, and comments and feedback from staff.

Various retreats and work sessions with the department's leadership team and management staff sought to focus the strategic plan by identifying priority areas. Workgroups consisting of staff and management were convened to further focus priority areas by outlining strategic initiatives within each. Subsequent division-level work sessions provided an overview

of the developing plan to staff with the purpose of integrating identified priority areas with action steps and outcomes. The resulting strategic plan -- more than a year in the making -- is the first ever undertaken by the Kent County Health Department and is a work in progress, but is truly a plan that reflects the views of all Department levels.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The strategic planning process outlined in this report is the first of its kind ever undertaken by the Kent County Health Department. It was a large and long undertaking, involving all parts of our organization and taking over a year to complete. It could not have been done without the participation of the 300-plus employees of the Kent County Health Department. In countless meetings, workgroups, and strategy sessions, the forward-thinking staff of the Health Department shared their thoughts, their concerns and their vision about what this organization is, and what it can be. The senior leadership team of the Health Department wishes to extend its gratitude to all of our staff and employees for making this strategic planning process a success, and for helping to realize a sound and comprehensive plan for the future of public health in Kent County.

**This strategic planning process benefitted greatly from the input of past and present members of the Community Health Advisory Committee:**

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