



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kent County Community Health Assessment finds Strengths, Weaknesses, and Direction for the Future

GRAND RAPIDS - Over the past year, Healthy Kent has gathered information from residents and stakeholders to build a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). Healthy Kent collected data through community health forums and health surveys, to identify key strengths, weaknesses, and health concerns for citizens of Kent County. Now, using this information, Healthy Kent is preparing to finalize a set of health-related priorities to address through a Community Health Improvement Plan.

The top health concerns identified by the community were obesity, alcohol abuse, and mental health issues. Other concerns receiving over 25 percent of votes included depression and stress. The least prevalent health concerns included infant mortality, prenatal health, and water quality. Key weaknesses that emerged through the CHNA include streets needing repair, lack of affordable housing, and poverty. Other key concerns include violence and safety, bus route expansion, and racism. "This data helps community organizations pinpoint the most prevalent concerns of people within Kent County," says Teresa Branson, Deputy Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. "Many of these weaknesses, when addressed thoroughly can lead to improvements in the health and well-being of the entire community."

The top three community strengths that emerged from this data are access to farmers markets, availability of healthcare, and an active community. Also, participants rated Kent County as a beautiful area and a great place to live in the top five strengths of the community. The least commonly identified strengths within Kent County included increasing community garden availability, health focus among the community, and low poverty levels.

These findings will help create the Community Health Improvement Plan, through which top community health concerns will be addressed. "Through the community health improvement planning process, we work to enhance and expand current programs within the community and develop new programs, if needed, to address the top health concerns," shared Paige Birkelbach, Epidemiologist at Kent County Health Department. "Our community partnerships continue to grow."

"Our findings give a good reflection on the community," said Barb Hawkins Palmer, Executive Director of Healthy Kent. "We were there to hear from those who wanted to share." To address the diversity among Kent County, more than 20 meeting locations were used to hold community forums.

Healthy Kent will release the full 2014 Community Health Needs Assessment report to the public during the Healthy Kent Winter Summit March 3, 2015. For more information on the Community Health Needs Assessment, visit www.kentcountychna.org or www.accesskent.com/Health.

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Healthy Kent is a collaborative community health assessment and improvement initiative in Kent County that works to improve the health and wellbeing of all county residents. Efforts of Healthy Kent include needs assessment, capacity building, and improvement of community health through awareness, education, advocacy and data-driven decision making. For more information, visit www.healthykent.org or www.kentcountychna.org.