Healthiest Nation in One Generation

For over 20 years the American Public Health Association has been sponsoring National Public Health Week; to recognize the work done by public health and the continued importance for improving the health of our communities. This year Public Health will be highlighting Generation Public Health - a movement that promotes prevention, advocacy and partnerships in creating healthy opportunities for everyone.

The Peoria City/County Health Department (PCCHD) has been contributing to the public health of our community by providing programs and services in disease prevention, health promotion, and environmental health protection. Recently, PCCHD worked in collaboration with the Tazewell County and Woodford County Health Departments, Heart of Illinois United Way, Bradley University and local hospital systems to create a comprehensive Community Health Improvement Plan. This regional plan addresses four key health priorities - Behavioral Health, Healthy Eating/Active Living, Reproductive Health, and Cancer. At the core of this improvement plan is working in partnership with various agencies to better align and support evidence-based strategies to improve health equity in our community; the very movement highlighted by Generation Public Health.

To ensure our Tri-County community will succeed in the challenges of creating the healthiest nation in one generation, it is vital to understand this movement is larger than a single agency. A healthy community is one that is safe, educated, economically strong, socially just; has access to healthy food and a healthy environment; encourages healthy behaviors; provides quality healthcare; and has a strong public health infrastructure. So how is this done?

When designing communities, health should be a priority. Whether it is improved housing, green space and parks, enhanced community safety, the ability to walk or bike, or zoning for businesses, all of these considerations play a pivotal role in health and the health of a community. In addition, improved educational attainment is one of the strongest indicators of good health. By having a community that strives to increase graduation rates, we will also increase an individual's future employment, income, and potential within the community.
Locally we see many of our health disparities highest among our most impoverished neighborhoods. Poverty increases stress and barriers in achieving healthy outcomes for adults and children. By working on policies to improve income equality, there will be an understandable increase in health.

Health equity and social justice focus on removing barriers and providing specific support to create opportunities for everyone to achieve the same healthy outcome. For many families, accessing healthy food options can be difficult. By working on providing safe, nutritious, and affordable food, we can eliminate food deserts and make healthy eating a realistic option.

We have seen both nationally and locally how environmental exposures, such as lead hazards and air pollution, have a lasting effect on the health of a community. Through policies and legislation, communities can look at protecting air quality and ensuring clean water and land.

Many people may argue that individuals make the choice to participate in unhealthy behaviors. However, the goal of a healthy community is to improve the options for healthy choices. Whether it is accessibility to nutritious food, increased smoke-free spaces, or planned bike and public transportation; the easiest option should be the healthiest.

Although the future of the Affordable Care Act is uncertain, there is national agreement on healthcare reform, the need to improve access and quality of healthcare, and to emphasize the importance of prevention strategies rather than just treatment after the fact.

The Partnership for a Healthy Community, recently developed by community partners and the general public throughout the Tri-County area, guides our vision through all these strategies to become a strong public health system - one that can adapt to the ever changing needs of the community and will lead partners and organizations to achieve the common goal of Generation Public Health.

Learn more about the benefits of public health policies and programs at www.pcchd.org
Peoria City/County Health Department, a nationally accredited public health department.

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