



Media Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Together! Healthy Knox Partnership Unveils Most Pressing Health Issues

Following more than a year of strategic data collection and analysis, the Together! Healthy Knox Partnership (T!HK) held a special meeting of community leaders this morning to announce what the group has identified as Knox County's most pressing health issues. More than 100 people gathered at the East Tennessee History Center to learn how their respective organizations can take action to improve health in Knox County.

"Health is much more than the absence of illness," said Dr. Warren Sayre, T!HK chair and administrator at Summit Medical Group. "To affect health broadly, broad participation is required. The Together! Healthy Knox initiative brings together representatives from diverse sectors with a stake in health, whether physical, mental, social or spiritual, and that is the key to successful long-term health improvement."

According to T!HK's research, the following are Knox County's most pressing health issues, stated in the form of questions needing answers.

Health Issue 1: How can we create a sustainable network of partnerships that effectively contributes to improved community health?

The collected data indicated deficiencies in communication and resource coordination between agencies and parts of the public health system in Knox County. Last December, more than 70 local leaders and representatives with a stake in health gathered to assess the local public health system (which is different than the public health department) and gave Knox County low scores in linking people to health services, evaluating those services, and mobilizing the partnerships necessary for effective health services.

Health Issue 2: How can we achieve equitable health outcomes for all our community members?

This strategic issue has implications in all areas of public and private health in Knox County. For example, infant mortality rates for African Americans in Knox County are more than twice as high as those for whites. Physical activity levels are significantly higher for college graduates than for those who are less educated; in fact, more than 42 percent of those without a high school diploma report no physical activity at all, compared to 13 percent of college graduates. Access to fresh foods is another

factor in Knox County's unequal health outcomes: the cost of a cart of groceries is 20 dollars higher in Central City, which has the lowest mean family income of any neighborhood in the county, than in Southwest County, which has the highest mean income.

Health Issue 3: How can we position health as a consideration in community policy and planning decisions?

During the December assessment, Knox County received low scores in the development and review of public health policies. When asked what forces will shape Knox County's health most powerfully in the near future, respondents indicated that an increased understanding and recognition of connections between health outcomes and environment, policy and systems change will be very important.

"The health of a community directly affects its economic viability," said Mark Field, T!HK vice chair and Knoxville Area Chamber Partnership senior vice president. "The county health data gathered by the T!HK team show many areas where improvements are needed, and our strategic issues grew naturally from the evaluation of those deficiencies."

Knox County Health Department launched Together! Healthy Knox in April 2009 to provide a framework for bringing together the individuals, groups and organizations involved in health and quality of life issues in the county, and to provide guidance for identifying and taking action on priority health issues. The initiative uses MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships), a strategic planning model developed by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO).

The Together! Healthy Knox Partnership grew from a community meeting held in May 2010 to engage business people, community and faith leaders, government officials and others in the initial strategic planning process. The twenty-member group spent the winter and spring of 2010/2011 conducting a robust process to identify the comprehensive strategic issues that have the potential to greatly improve health and quality of life in Knox County.

One result of the May 19 meeting will be the formation of three action teams that will begin a strategic planning process to define objectives and tactics aimed at addressing each strategic issue. Broad community participation and careful evaluation will be the focus of this process.

"Improving the public's health goes well beyond the walls of the health department," said Dr. Martha Buchanan, Knox County Health Department director. "Businesses, neighborhoods, schools, faith institutions and other community organizations and members all play a role in health and quality of life."

"Even after going through such a comprehensive process to identify these issues, they still need to be addressed," Sayre emphasized. "Now we need to engage more community members to take action."

The Together! Healthy Knox Leadership Team members are:

- Marie Alcorn, Vice President of Community Engagement & Mobilization, United Way of Greater Knoxville
- Kristy Altman, Managing Director, Knoxville Track Club
- David Brace, Deputy Director of Public Services, City of Knoxville
- Martha Buchanan, MD, Director, KCHD
- Jim Decker, CEO, Medic Regional Blood Center
- Jim Dickson, CEO, YMCA of East Tennessee
- Paul Erwin, Director, UT Center for Public Health
- Mark Field, Senior Vice President of Membership, Knoxville Area Chamber Partnership

- Coral Getino, President, HoLa (Hora Latina)
- Carolyn Hansen, Clearinghouse Coordinator, Compassion Coalition
- Ben Harrington, Executive Director, Mental Health Association of East Tennessee
- Melissa Knight, Executive Director, Interfaith Health Clinic
- Jack Lacey, Senior Vice President & Chief Medical Officer, University of Tennessee Medical Center
- Aneisa McDonald, Coordinated School Health Specialist, Knox County Schools
- Gus Paidousis, Deputy Chief, Knoxville Police Department
- Karen Pershing, Executive Director, Metropolitan Drug Commission
- Madeline Rogero, Director, City of Knoxville Community Development
- Grant Rosenberg, Director, Knox County Community Development
- Warren Sayre, Physician Clinical Director of Integrated Health Services, Summit Medical Group
- Rosalyn Tillman, Assistant Dean, Pellissippi State Community College

For more information about Together! Healthy Knox and to view the reports, go to www.healthyknox.org or contact Erin Read at (865) 215-5549.

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