

COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLANS SUMMARY

(Complete plan submitted to the Minnesota Department of Health in January 2009)

Community health service agencies that accept Minnesota Public Health Grant funds are required, every five years, to complete an assessment of community health needs and develop plans to improve the health of the public in the geographic area served by the agency. These plans are to be presented for discussion and approval to the respective community health board and then forwarded to the Minnesota Department of Health.

In 2007 and 2008, Rice County Community Health Services (CHS) completed a number of initiatives in order to better understand the health status and health needs of the residents of Rice County and also to assess the ability of our agency to serve the public. Activities included a series of thirty-six key informant interviews with representatives of education, health, and social services; several focus groups and group interviews; a written survey completed by almost four hundred county residents; and a review of statistical and other data related to the health and demographics of people living in Rice County. In addition, the CHS Administrator completed a capacity assessment from the Minnesota Department of Health covering those activities that are considered essential for any public health department in Minnesota.

Based on the assessment data gathered, input from the Rice County Community Health Services Advisory Committee, and the knowledge that Rice County Community Health Services staff have from day-to-day interactions with clients and the community at large, the CHS Administrator identified nine community health issues with accompanying action plans and recommended them to the Rice County Community Health Board for submission to the Minnesota Department of Health. The Board voted on December 30, 2008 to authorize the CHS Administrator to forward the assessment and plan to the Minnesota Department of Health and this was done in January 2009.

The nine identified areas, along with a brief summary of proposed improvement plans are as follows:

- Recruiting and retaining a qualified professional public health workforce through development of new recruitment tools and strategies, attendance at career fairs and related programs, and possible development of a summer internship program for students interested in a career in public health nursing
- Maintaining a workforce that is able to provide services that can efficiently and effectively provide public health services to the diverse populations living in Rice County, through recruitment efforts in areas most likely to reach persons with skills and interest in serving linguistically and culturally diverse populations; and providing additional education to staff who work with Rice County residents whose language and culture is different from their own
- Reducing the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases in Rice County through education with individual agency clients, public information and outreach, and provision of information about STDs to partner organizations in the community in formats and languages that will reach all population groups

- Developing a better understanding of the increasing incidence of births to adolescents ages seventeen and under in Rice County, and implementing interventions based on this assessment; this will be accomplished through data gathering and analysis and work with young people themselves, parents, and community members in the fields of education, social services, law enforcement, health/mental health, and child care
- Responding to the needs of homeless persons in Rice County and working with partner agencies to prevent homelessness, through participation in the Homeless Response Team in Rice County, taking part in the planning and implementation of the annual Rice County Community Connect event, referring to agencies that work with persons who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, gathering data on the extent of homelessness and the needs of homeless persons in our county, and developing new ways to find and serve this population
- Reducing morbidity and mortality related to lack of access to health services, including oral health services, through support for community coalitions such as the HealthFinders Collaborative, establishment and support for public/private partnerships to bring oral health and other health services to un/underinsured populations in Rice County, information and outreach designed to connect residents with programs such as MinnesotaCare, the Minnesota Family Planning Program, and Medical Assistance, and development of a preventive fluoride varnish service to be offered in conjunction with the WIC Program
- Reducing the incidence of elevated blood lead levels in children in Rice County through promotion of increased lead testing during well child exams, education for parents and others who care for children, follow-up of children found to have elevated blood lead levels, and education for landlords and others responsible for environments that could expose children to lead
- Developing/identifying alternative staffing resources that could assist with the response to a public health emergency in Rice County by continuing to serve as local administrator for the statewide Minnesota Responds! volunteer registry, recruiting additional members of the local Reserve Nurse Program, seeking outside sources of assistance such as through the Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency, and partnering with other counties in Southeast Minnesota
- Reducing the risk for heat related illness and improving the response to high levels of environmental heat and humidity through work with public and private partners to develop and implement heat response guidelines, public education regarding ways to reduce the risk of heat related illness and how to identify and respond to these situations if they occur, education and provision of resources for contracted vendors responsible for the care of vulnerable adults and children, and monitoring and education of those clients served directly by our agency

The above items for agency action and improvement are not a list of all agency priorities, but rather identification of some areas that, with some effort and attention, could increase the effectiveness of our agency and improve health outcomes for Rice County residents.

Mary Ho, Administrator
Rice County Community Health Services