

For immediate release

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Community Sets 'Common Agenda' to Improve the Health of All

Local health officials released a community plan Wednesday that identifies public health priorities in Lewis and Clark County and specific strategies to address them.

The 2016 Community Health Improvement Plan was developed over four months by a task force of about 50 people. The group included representatives of the health-care profession, social services, business, education, civic and nonprofit groups, law enforcement, and local and state government. Lewis and Clark Public Health and St. Peter's Hospital led the process.

"The purpose of the plan is to establish a common agenda that will help all of us focus our energy and resources," said Melanie Reynolds, county health officer and director of the local health department. "We'll be most effective in improving people's health if we all pull in the same direction."

The task force reviewed local, state, and national health data to help it identify specific areas of health that it believes the county most urgently needs to address over the next few years. Then the group looked at proven, national health-improvement practices to come up with ways to address these priorities:

- Mental health: Suicide, depression and anxiety, mental illness in the criminal justice system
- Substance abuse: Alcohol use, binge drinking
- Chronic disease: Physical activity, nutrition, tobacco use
- Communicable disease: Risky sexual behavior, immunizations
- Maternal and child health: Adverse childhood experiences
- Environmental health and injury: Air pollution, lead exposure, safe driving practices
- Access: Having access to an ongoing source of health care

"The important thing about this plan is that it's a community plan, not a hospital or health department plan," said Dr. Fred Olson, interim chief executive officer of St. Peter's Hospital. "It represents the community's biggest concerns about health. All of us can play a role in implementing it, and all of us can benefit from it."

A copy of the plan is available on the health department website at <http://www.lccountymt.gov/health/about-us/health-improvement-plan.html> To get a printed copy, call the health department at 457-8908.

The public is invited to comment on the plan by emailing publichealth@lccountymt.gov or mailing Lewis and Clark Public Health, Attn: Gayle Shirley, 1930 Ninth Avenue, Helena MT 59601.

The task force plans to reconvene in a year to identify and discuss progress toward implementing the plan's strategies.

“This isn't a plan that's going to sit on a shelf,” Reynolds said. “We fully intend it to be a working road map that leads to measurable improvements in public health.”