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Harris County Public Health Releases Report to Transform Health in Harris County
Landmark Report Provides Transformational Recommendations to Improve the Health of County Residents

HOUSTON—Harris County Public Health (HCPH) today released a landmark study assessing the overall health of Harris County residents and recommendations for improvement. The first-ever report “Harris Cares: A 2020 Vision of Health in Harris County” provides five transformational recommendations to improve the health of Harris County residents.

The ambitious study covered many areas in health and factors that influence health outcomes including access to health care, mental health, injury, transportation and emergency preparedness, among others. It is the result of Harris County Commissioners Court’s request for HCPH to review the health state of its residents and make suggested recommendations on how to improve health.

Health-related key findings

- In Harris County, one-in-three youth aged 12-17 is overweight or obese. For adults, some communities have over 50% of adults classified as obese.
- Approximately one-in-five adults lacks health insurance, with some communities having more than 1 in 3 adults lacking health insurance.
- The Harris County population has been growing faster than its healthcare infrastructure, making healthcare access more difficult.

“The goal of the health study is to improve the quality of life for Harris County residents in addition to increasing life expectancy, which varies across the county. County average life expectancy is 78.7, however some census tracts are as low as 65 years and others as high as 89 years,” said Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Executive Director of HCPH. “Where you live often determines how well and how long you live.”

The overarching five recommendations are transformational, requiring groundbreaking systems-level changes including:
- Drive systems-level change through prevention and upstream focused solutions that incorporate health and social services in a more integrated and effective manner.
- Strengthen integration of health services and systems by coordinating delivery of existing health care services, and developing new health care infrastructure where needed to improve access to health care across the community.
- Enhance the safety net system to address better the ongoing health needs of Harris County residents who are under or uninsured, including through the creation of a new, robust delivery model called “Harris Care.”
- Align strategies across existing county and municipal governmental departments that impact health to improve communication, coordination and collaboration.
- Streamline and integrate health care and prevention services across Harris County and the City of Houston.

There are several suggested ways that the overarching recommendation could be reached such as: creating a ‘one-stop shop for health’ by enhancing existing or creating additional community health clinics that focus on preventive services and that are co-located with public health, mental health, and social services. These wrap-around service clinics should also allow for increased surge capacity during an emergency. Also, investing in public health prevention and social factors that impact health through county-wide coordination, just to name a few.

The health study was done in collaboration with a wide-variety of partners and subject matter experts, in addition to HCPH staff. Though the data was important, HCPH also interviewed more than 200 experts and community members. Sectors ranged from healthcare, businesses, non-profits, faith-based organizations, elected officials and responses allowed for over 100 unique institutional perspectives.

A summary and the full report is available on HCPH’s Harris Cares page: www.hcphtx.org/Harris-Cares.

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