SKOKIE COMMUNITY
2017 HEALTH PLAN

A FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY FOR A HEALTHIER SKOKIE
“What do you think are the most important health issues in Skokie?”
I am excited to present to you the 2017 Skokie Community Health Plan, a five-year blueprint for enhancing the health and well-being of people who live, work, or attend school in the Village. This plan was developed over two years, during which we actively sought input from people with diverse backgrounds and interests. Nearly 2,000 of you completed a community health survey, offered in six languages, that we distributed widely with the help of the library, park district, hospital, schools, and others. We interviewed 53 Skokie leaders, from local government officials and business owners to those representing immigrants, refugees, seniors and people with mental illness. Our primary goal throughout this process was to ensure that we identified, and will address, the health concerns that matter most to community members.

In the five years since we introduced the first Skokie Community Health Plan in 2012, we have achieved much of what we set out to do. Our top priority has been to ensure that high-quality, affordable healthcare is available to all Skokie residents. When we began, there were no clinics in our area serving people without health insurance. I am very pleased to report that two Federally Qualified Health Centers have opened their doors to meet this need: Asian Human Services Family Health Center and Erie Evanston/Skokie Family Health Center. More than 3,000 Skokie residents now receive care at these facilities, regardless of their underlying health conditions, their health insurance status or their ability to pay. Other community health successes since 2012 included:

- Producing the first Skokie Environmental Sustainability Plan
- Adopting a “Complete Streets” policy, prioritizing walking, bicycling and public transportation
- Building the multi-use path linking Skokie to Lincolnwood and beyond
- Opening the Skokie Swift Oakton Street Station
- Measuring childhood obesity rates in the Village
- Launching the “Rethink Your Drink” educational campaign
- Developing tobacco cessation classes for Turning Point Behavioral Health Care Center clients
- Assisting Oakton Community College campuses to become “smoke-free”

This document is an action plan. During the next five years, we will focus on four priorities: Healthy Active Living, Social and Psychological Support, Promoting Equity, and Access to Healthcare. As you read through this plan, you will find numerous initiatives that we believe will strengthen our community connections, increase opportunities for physical activity, and improve the quality of life in the Village. I hope that you see yourself in these pages, and will join us as we work together to fulfill the goals of the 2017 Skokie Community Health Plan.

Sincerely,

Catherine A. Counard, MD, MPH
Director of Health
Every five years the Skokie Health Department conducts a community health needs assessment and develops a five-year community health plan as part of the State of Illinois re-certification process. For the 2017 plan, we took special care to identify and address health disparities. Many community members assisted with this project and will work together to fulfill the goals and objectives.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- A five-year plan that serves the entire community
- Meets the needs of people across their lifespan
- Considers issues of equity, through the social determinants of health
- Will address four community health priorities through initiatives, programs and education

**The Process**

Three primary methods were used to seek input from community members and collect data to determine the most important health issues in the Village:

1. **Community Health Surveys:**
   - 1,910 surveys were completed in six different languages. Adults who live, work, or attend school in Skokie, or have children in Skokie schools, were invited to respond. Surveys were distributed through the Library, chamber of commerce, park district, Niles Township Food Pantry, and numerous other entities to reach a wide range of community members.

2. **Interviews of 53 community stakeholders, in part focused on:**
   - The three largest, fastest growing immigrant populations: South Asians, Filipinos, and Assyrians
   - The needs of senior citizens
   - Those seeking mental health services
   - Lower-income residents

3. **Public Health Data Analysis:**
   - Data on demographics, socioeconomic status, hospital discharge information, communicable diseases, and birth and death rates in Skokie was collected and analyzed.

**Who is responsible?**

The Skokie Health Department has overall responsibility for fulfilling the 2017 Community Health Plan, assisted by the Board of Health and IPLAN Committee*. The Board of Health is a diverse group of Skokie residents with expertise in public health appointed by the Mayor. The IPLAN Committee is comprised of representatives from key Skokie entities such as the hospital, schools, park district, public library, community college, and human services organizations.

*Illinois Plan for Local Assessment of Needs (IPLAN)*
Survey Results
The Skokie Community Health Survey was widely distributed over a six-week period in early 2016. In total 1,910 surveys were collected online and in paper format. More than 800 people submitted comments for the two open-ended questions. The survey was offered in six languages; 95% were completed in English.

Who completed the survey?
Adults who live, work, or attend school in Skokie, or have children in Skokie schools, were invited to complete the survey.

- 83% were Skokie residents, half had lived here for over 20 years
- 67% were women, 33% were men
- 32% were born outside of the United States
- The most common countries of origin were India, Iraq, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Syria.
- Their time in the US ranged from 4 months to 90 years.
- 25% primarily spoke a language other than English at home. The top languages were Assyrian, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Urdu.

Quotes and statistical results from the survey are included throughout this plan.

Final Health Priorities Established:
- Healthy Active Living throughout the Lifespan
- Social and Psychological Support
- Social Determinants of Health: Promoting Equity
- Access to Healthcare

Interestingly, these priorities align with national and regional public health priorities, which will create new opportunities for future collaboration, funding, and sharing best practices.
Goal:
Strengthen initiatives that encourage active lifestyles, good nutrition, and create supportive environments.

A healthy lifestyle doesn’t have to mean running marathons or belonging to a gym. Simply walking instead of driving can go a long way towards improving overall health and quality of life. The Village has adopted a "complete streets" policy in part to promote walking by connecting all Skokie neighborhoods with sidewalks that feel safe, inviting, and accessible. By creating a supportive environment it is easier to incorporate healthy activities like walking into an everyday routine.

School environments can create healthy habits early in life. Our 2015 Childhood Obesity study revealed that 34% of students in Skokie public schools were overweight and half of these children were obese. Being overweight as a child increases the likelihood of chronic diseases such as diabetes or high blood pressure as adults. School is where children spend most of their time outside of home. It’s essential that we work with schools to develop programs and policies that help children maintain a healthy weight.

Objectives:
• Make physical activity an integral and routine part of life.
• Ensure that healthy food and beverage options are the routine, easy choice.
• Ensure that programs are culturally inclusive and family oriented.
• Promote and support the Village Complete Streets Policy, prioritizing walking, bicycling, and public transportation.

Another important aspect of healthy living is nutrition. On the 2015 National Citizen Survey, 17% of Skokie residents answered no to the question: "Do you eat at least five portions of fruits and vegetables per day?" When we asked why, the two most common reasons given were cost and not knowing the best way to prepare healthy meals. Initiatives to facilitate using produce include providing fresh vegetables to the Niles Township Food Pantry and hosting healthy cooking classes at the Skokie Public Library.

"Walking campaigns in Skokie would be a nice way to get people out and moving."

“My budget does not always allow me to consider purchasing fresh fruit for the family.”
HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING INITIATIVES

- Support initiatives to install sidewalks, slow traffic flow, and have interesting streetscapes.
- Encourage employers to establish public transportation benefit programs.
- Stripe 5.5 miles of bike lanes along Church Street.
- Continue to add bike racks in Skokie.
- Complete the Skokie Valley Trail multi-use path between Dempster Street and Golf Road.
- Enhance cooperation between Skokie governmental entities to support healthy, active living.
- Encourage employee wellness programs, such as healthy vending machine options and walking meetings.
- Ensure that people are aware of the low-cost fitness programs available through the Skokie Park District.
- Promote community walking groups, possibly with guided tours of area parks and forest preserves.

HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING FOR CHILDREN - SCHOOLS

- Work with school wellness committees to promote healthy active living for staff and students.
- Encourage all Skokie schools to complete the Alliance for a Healthier Generation’s Assessment Tool.
- Ensure there are safe routes for bicycling and walking to all Skokie schools. Evaluate options for a “Walking School Bus” program.
- Encourage staff to model healthy behaviors like using reusable water bottles and incorporating physical activity into the daily classroom routine.
- Promote organized physical activities like “Jump Rope for Heart” and “Girls on the Run”.

HEALTHY ACTIVE LIVING PROGRAMS/EDUCATION

- Host annual events promoting the benefits of walking, biking, and public transportation.
- Evaluate the feasibility of a bicycle-sharing program in Skokie.
- Ensure that Skokie public playgrounds have multi-generational and special-needs equipment.
- Initiate a healthy recipe challenge, including ethnic dishes, and produce from the Farmers’ Market.
- Obtain funding to establish a LINK benefits program at the Farmers’ Market.
- Continue the successful “Rethink Your Drink” program.
- Continue culturally tailored health classes at the Skokie Park District, such as the women-only class.
- Host healthy cooking demonstrations at the Skokie Public Library featuring various traditional foods.
Social connections are an integral part of a long and healthy life. People can become isolated because of lack of physical mobility, limited ability to speak English, or economic barriers. Initiatives that create stronger community connections and provide opportunities to socialize can improve physical and mental health outcomes for everyone.

Traditional mental health services are needed as well. According to the National Institute on Mental Health nearly one in five Americans suffers from some form of mental illness each year. During 2010 to 2014, Skokie residents had more than 2,000 hospital admissions for psychiatric illness. In addition, 26% of people who completed the Skokie Community Health Survey said that they had a hard time getting mental health care. It is imperative that funding is maintained. Due to the Illinois budget impasse, more than one million people have lost access to critical services.

Beyond access to care, addressing the stigma associated with mental health issues is important. Having a mental illness is not a moral or personal failing. Reducing stigma can increase the likelihood that individuals seek treatment, as well as improve the community’s ability to recognize and help someone struggling with mental illness or substance abuse.
SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT INITIATIVES

- Promote an interdisciplinary approach to mental health involving schools, health care facilities, community based organizations, religious entities, and Village of Skokie programming.
- Support activities that bring the community together, reduce isolation, and promote social connections.
- Raise awareness that current or previous life stressors can adversely affect health behaviors, and evidence-based programs can reduce these effects.
- Promote visitor/companionship (volunteer or paid) programs to relieve loneliness in the elderly and increase opportunities for adult day programming.
- Support legislation and policy initiatives to prevent and treat substance abuse and addiction.
- Advocate to maintain critical funding for local mental health providers.
- Develop and launch a community-wide anti-stigma campaign.
- Develop referral networks for healthcare providers adopting trauma-informed care.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS/EDUCATION

- Promote “Mental Health First Aid” training for the public, religious congregations, local government, and community organizations.
- Provide “Trauma Informed Care” training for area physicians, dentists, community health workers, and others as needed. Incorporate this training into the residency programs of area hospital systems.
- Promote universal Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for all Skokie area first responders.
- Continue Health Department tobacco cessation programs and youth tobacco use prevention initiatives.
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH: PROMOTING EQUITY

“It behooves all of us to make sure that the poorest and newest and oldest of us are cared for.”

“The services are available, but those who have mobility and/or money issues can’t access them.”

Goal:
Work to reduce social and health inequities by promoting life-enhancing strategies that reflect a commitment to those in need.

Objectives:
- Promote a just, tolerant community.
- Build a culture of collaboration in Skokie to reduce inequities.
- Reduce economic hardship for all people who are struggling, through education, training, and connecting to existing services.
- Evaluate the needs of people with disabilities in Skokie.

Differences in social determinants reduce health equity, which is the ability for everyone to achieve their full health potential. For example, if you do not have a high school diploma you are more likely to be below the federal poverty level, not have health insurance, and be unemployed compared to someone with a high school diploma or a GED. Lower-income residents, minorities, and foreign-born individuals also report poorer health and are less likely to have health insurance.

We are determined to identify and minimize barriers that reduce health equity. As we implement the initiatives in this plan, we will work to ensure that the benefits are accessible to all Skokie residents. Possible strategies to achieve this are by providing information in multiple languages and offering programs in locations accessible to public transportation. We will strive to maintain open channels of communication with community members to receive feedback on whether we are effectively reducing the barriers they face.
PROMOTING EQUITY INITIATIVES

- Create a “Welcome Center” that connects all Skokie residents with resources they might need, including job training, finding work, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, computer/tech classes, GED/higher learning opportunities, achieving citizenship, healthcare insurance/access navigation, and more.
- Train community health workers for outreach from the “Welcome Center” programs, coordinating with the family liaisons in schools, English Language Learner Parent Center (ELL), and healthcare system.
- Support and promote the food pantry by assisting with the fresh produce initiative.
- Promote the work of "Skokie Cares”.
- Participate in events increasing awareness of the impact of racism and discrimination, such as the annual "Stand Against Racism”.
- Develop a more formal relationship with refugee placement agencies.
- Promote high school or GED completion for all adults in Skokie.
- Work with Oakton Community College to remove barriers preventing students from completing degrees.
- The Health Department will continue to regularly review available Skokie-level health data by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability status and report identified disparities.

PROMOTING EQUITY PROGRAMS/EDUCATION

- Identify community gathering places where health education materials can be shared. Ensure that materials are culturally appropriate and in multiple languages.
- Health Department staff, and other interested parties, will receive training to assist with identifying and addressing the needs of immigrants and refugees.
- Conduct informational sessions for the Skokie community on the impact of social determinants of health.
- Review existing governmental and community programs and policies through an equity lens.
ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Goal:
Ensure that high quality, affordable healthcare, including medical, mental, dental and vision care, is available and accessible to all members of our diverse community.

Objectives:
- Advocate for all Skokie residents to have access to comprehensive medical care, including primary care and specialty care services.
- Support the continued expansion of local Federally Qualified Health Centers, to address unmet needs in Skokie.
- Support innovative healthcare interventions focused on outcomes and the social determinants of health.
- Advocate to increase funding for and access to dental health services for all people regardless of insurance status or ability to pay.

Improving access to healthcare was the top priority for the 2012 Skokie Community Health Plan and we have worked hard over the past five years to address this pressing need. Two Federally Qualified Health Centers have now opened locally: Asian Human Services Family Health Center and Erie Evanston/Skokie Family Health Center. These clinics provide health, dental, and mental health services for people regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay.

In addition, according to the American Community Survey, the percent of Skokie residents without health insurance decreased from 14% in 2009 to 8.5% in 2015. This change is a function of both the Affordable Care Act and unemployment returning to pre-recession levels in the Village.

Despite this progress, 11% of Skokie residents who completed the 2016 Community Health Survey still found it difficult to access medical care. People who were unemployed or had an annual household income below $50,000 were four times more likely to have this difficulty. Furthermore, aggregate hospital data for 2010 – 2014 revealed that Skokie residents who paid for their own care out-of-pocket were much less likely to get routinely recommended health screenings.

Dental care was the most difficult service to access for the largest number of survey respondents. According to the National Association for Dental Plans, 47% of Americans had no dental insurance in 2012. A dental health needs assessment conducted as part of our process revealed that residents who utilized the food pantry reported the greatest unmet dental need. Many of these individuals had to limit their food choices due to poor dentition.

“Dental costs are out of control, in the thousands. I would go to a (low-cost) dental clinic if it was in Skokie.”

“Healthcare services should be available for all.”
ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE INITIATIVES

- Continue to monitor the proportion of Skokie residents who are uninsured annually.
- Employ new approaches to distributing information about Skokie-area Federally Qualified Health Centers, such as using materials in multiple languages and focusing on locations where people gather.
- Encourage everyone to have a medical home, that provides preventive and coordinated care.
- Continue connecting people to insurance navigators, for assistance enrolling in and using health insurance.
- Promote health screenings and other preventive services for adults.
- Work to remove barriers to obtaining recommended preventive services.
- Evaluate the impact of changes in access to health insurance on provision of care through local hospital systems and health care providers.
- Support local hospital system efforts to enroll uninsured patients presenting in the Emergency Department in a health insurance plan.
- Facilitate connections between childcare centers and dentists.
- Evaluate vision care options for uninsured Skokie residents who do not have insurance.

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE PROGRAMS/EDUCATION

- Hold health education programs at the library, in collaboration with the Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- Provide information on health insurance plan options at the library.
- Promote the importance of dental, vision and mental health care.
- Provide information on available dental care resources at the Niles Township Food Pantry.
- Health Department staff, and others interested in participating, will receive training in health literacy, plain language, and culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

Despite the uncertainty of funding for healthcare at both the federal and state levels, access to healthcare will remain a Community Health Plan priority, which will be addressed locally to the extent possible.
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