

**Recommendations  
of the  
Saint Paul–Ramsey County  
Community Health Services Advisory Committee**

June 2008

The Saint Paul – Ramsey County Community Health Services Advisory Committee (CHSAC) advises the Mayor, City Council and County Board on issues related to public health as defined in the Joint Powers Agreement approved by both local governments in December 1996.

For the past nine months the committee has focused on the topics of health and wellness in Saint Paul Schools, climate change and public health, the department’s strategic planning efforts, healthy youth development and preventing sexual violence. The committee has heard and discussed presentations from staff from the Department (Jane Norbin, Paula Henry, SuzAnn Stenso-Velo, Grit Youngquist and Emily Huemann), from the Saint Paul Schools (Ann Hoxie), from the Mayor’s Office (Anne Hunt), from a non-profit corporation (J. Drake Hamilton – Fresh Energy) and from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health (Dr. Matt Commers).

Based on the presentations by staff and other experts and discussions by the Committee members, the following recommendations, not in any priority order, have been developed for consideration and action by the Saint Paul City Council and the Ramsey County Board.

**Recommendation #1:** Existing and anticipated health issues related to climate change should be treated as a public health issue and the Department of Public Health should be at the forefront of the climate change concerns. Raising awareness of the impact of greenhouse gases and the expected climate change should be seen as an opportunity to build citizen commitments for change in behaviors involving individuals and communities. The Department should identify ways to both prevent greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for ways to adapt to the changing climate that may impact the health of the public. The CHSAC recommends:

- Advocate for mitigation including the reduction of greenhouse gases that impact on and promote the numerous co-benefits that people will realize when they begin to change their behaviors to lessen their climate change impact. (For example, replacing old windows with new ones not only saves energy, but also reduces the possible exposure of lead paint dust often seen in older windows and riding a bicycle reduces emissions and improves health.)

- Develop the expertise to design response plans to climate-driven health concerns. Prepare for possible climate-associated health challenges, such as extreme heat, extreme weather (floods and droughts), air pollution, and the spread of water, food, and animal-borne infectious disease.
- Observe National Public Health Week 2008 with the theme “Climate Change: Our Health in the Balance.” Identify that segment of the population that is reluctant to make changes and focus on increasing their understanding of the issue.
- Advocate for the federal government to fund additional climate research, strengthen climate surveillance networks, and train more public health professionals in the skills needed to combat climate-associated health issues.
- Maintain strong public health programs to avoid many of the impacts of climate change on health. Such as, monitor health, investigate disease, inform and educate the public, develop sound public policy, mobilize support and respond to health emergencies.

**Recommendation #2:** During the past two decades, the prevalence of obesity in children has increased dramatically. Obesity in childhood causes a wide range of serious complications, and increases the risk of premature illness and death later in life. The essential cause of the increase in overweight children and adolescents is caloric imbalance, which results from inadequate physical activity, poor dietary choices, or both. The CHSAC recommends supporting legislation that would do the following:

- Require the Minnesota Department of Education to create statewide standards for health and physical education and include effective teacher training to implement these standards.
- Reinstate a graduation requirement of one-half credit of health and one-half credit of physical education in order to graduate from Minnesota’s high schools.
- Require that federally mandated school wellness plans be fully implemented across all schools, classroom events, fundraisers and parent events.
- Support the passage and funding of the State Health Improvement Program.
- Provide more and safer walking and bicycle paths.

**Recommendation #3:** A fundamental function of the Department is the control of communicable disease in our community. The events of the past decade, from anthrax infections to sudden acute respiratory syndrome to the potential of a pandemic influenza, highlight the need for strong efforts in this area. The CHSAC recommends the County Board and City Council maintain and improve the capacity within the Department to prevent and control communicable diseases in our community. The following elements of the Ramsey County disease prevention and control system must be supported:

- Continue a strong commitment to surveillance and the early identification of an epidemic, disease, or health problem within our population.
- Continue the services of disease investigation and the identification of those people who may be impacted by a communicable disease.
- Provision of prevention or treatment measures to individuals who may be impacted by a communicable disease with a special focus on sexually transmitted infections and vaccine preventable diseases. In order to accomplish this, the Department must have trained staff to conduct surveillance and disease investigation with resources to be able to provide continued availability, implement prevention and treatment measures in a timely way and develop and use electronic communication and analysis systems to efficiently and effectively identify and control communicable diseases.

**Recommendation #4** – Research over the past decade indicates that healthy youth development strategies for youth 0 to 21 years of age must include the deliberate process of providing all youth with the support, relationships, experiences, resources, and opportunities needed to become successful and competent adults and reduce a wide-range of adolescent health-risk behaviors. The CHSAC recommends the County work with a consultant to develop an operational plan with a phased strategic process toward achieving seamless, comprehensive delivery of services for at-risk youth and families to do the following:

- Identify barriers to access to services including education, transportation, and convenient service locations.
- Identify existing best practice youth service models in and outside of the County as a guide for future work with community agencies. Include program evaluation to collect data, measure program effectiveness and generate reports on these best practices.
- Identify ways County leadership can work in partnership with its constituents to promote neighborhood decision-making and community-building efforts.
- Identify processes for continually seeking feedback from youth and their families.

- Create processes for improving communication and collaboration among County Departments.
- Identify ways to work better with community-based agencies and schools in the delivery of services to youth and families.
- Identify one important children's outcome and implement a pilot project to test how the County can create a culture where collaboration and partnering with community exemplifies our way of doing business.
- Develop strategies for reinvesting County program savings in prevention and early intervention programs and services.

**Recommendation #5** - In December 2007, the Joint Public Health Advisory Committee (Saint Paul-Ramsey County, Minneapolis and Hennepin County) conducted a fall forum on the topic of "healthy youth development," with the focus on asset-based or positive youth development. The goal of the forum was to advise the audience on how public health can address healthy youth development.

The audience was asked to respond to the question, "What would you like your public health department to work on regarding healthy youth development?" The majority of respondents recommended public health efforts focus on parent-child connectedness and children's mental health. As a result, the Joint Public Health Advisory Committee staff formulated and the CHSAC has endorsed the following recommendations:

- Seek funding to help enhance, expand, and sustain programs supporting parent-child connectedness and children's mental health.
- Assist in establishing these efforts in the communities served by the public health departments.
- Extend these efforts throughout childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.
- Combine efforts and share resources between the public health systems to be efficient and cost-effective.

**Recommendation #6** – Employee-based health promotion is an important way that long-term health can be improved. Steps to a Healthier Saint Paul and Active Living Ramsey County are important health promotion efforts. It is important that the City and the County are models in developing and carrying out health promotion opportunities for their employees.

**Recommendation #7** – Sexual violence is the use of sexual actions or words that are unwanted by and/or harmful to another person. Sexual violence is a serious public health problem. Each year, Sexual Offense Services of Ramsey County (SOS) serves more than 750 survivors of sexual assault and more than 500 family members and friends of sexual assault survivors. It is possible to prevent sexual violence. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, sexual assault in Minnesota costs approximately \$8 billion/year or \$1,540 per resident.

On March 11, 2008, the Board of Ramsey County Commissioners adopted a resolution publicly stating their commitment to stopping sexual violence. The Board directed County staff to develop specific action steps using a tool call the Spectrum of Prevention (Prevention Institute, Oakland, CA) and to report back to the Board in Fall 2008. Additionally, the Board directed the County Manager to coordinate sexual violence prevention and intervention efforts with state and national plans.

The CHSAC commends the County Board for its vision, passion and action to end sexual violence and makes the following recommendations:

- Mayor and City Council make a public commitment to stop sexual violence.
- City of Saint Paul departments/divisions be directed to use the Spectrum of Prevention tool to:
  - Inventory current City efforts for prevention and intervention of sexual violence; and
  - Develop a comprehensive strategy for preventing and responding to sexual violence.
- City and County elected officials and staff strengthen efforts for sexual violence prevention in Saint Paul and Ramsey County by:
  - Recommending that the Joint Property Tax Advisory Committee determine how the city, county and schools can effectively work together over the next 5 years to effectively prevent and respond to sexual violence; and
  - Identifying specific ways to connect City and County prevention and intervention efforts in order to maximize resources and impact; and
  - Committing to working together to the greatest extent possible to end sexual violence in our communities.