

Ingham County Board of Health

Priority Focus Areas for 2006

Background

The Ingham County Board of Health (BOH) understands that it is charged by the Ingham County Board of Commissioners (BOC) to represent the interests of the people of Ingham County in the consideration of issues impacting public health. In carrying out this charge, the BOH will endeavor to communicate periodically with the BOC on its work. It is hoped that these communications will assist the BOC in the formulation of its annual health priorities. The BOH also stands ready to review and develop recommendations on specific health concerns, at the request of the BOC or the Health Department.

Between November 2005 and January 2006, the BOH engaged in facilitated dialogue to identify priority areas for the coming year. For each issue that has been identified as a priority area, the board will engage in the following process in 2006:

- Review available information on the issue
- Review what is currently being done to address it
- Consider possible actions the BOH could take
- Decide on any action to take
- Assess the effectiveness of the actions taken

Actions to be taken might include formally advising the Health Department or the BOC on a particular policy; holding a press conference (in collaboration with the ICHD and the BOC) to provide information to the public on the topic; writing letters to elected bodies; or recommending an assessment of programs or services related to the issue.

Process

The BOH has identified five priority focus areas for its work in 2006. These were derived from a process that included the examination of available information on health status and the underlying causes of illness and wellbeing in Ingham County, followed by facilitated dialogue. The priority areas and the rationale for their selection is presented on the following page.

Two of the areas, “Health Inequity” and “Best Practices” will be addressed throughout the year, as they are reflected in each of the other three as well. Therefore, in examining environmental health issues, grassroots efforts to improve health, and food and weight, the BOH will be particularly concerned with impacts on people of color, people with low socioeconomic status, and other potential target groups. In considering potential action, it will also consider best practices to promote for replication.

PRIORITY AREAS

- **HEALTH INEQUITY.** Health status data shows a persistent disparity in health outcomes between people of color and whites, for which there is no biological explanation. The Board of Health will examine the factors influencing health disparities in race and class, and their connection to access to social resources such as housing, education, and employment. The work that was done by the ICHD Social Justice Project last year will be one source of information. The Board of Health may wish to consider actions that would raise community awareness and understanding of health inequity in the community.
- **BEST PRACTICES.** Many of the accomplishments of the Ingham County Health Department are not well known in the community. Consequently, the strategies and practices of the health department are unlikely to be replicated by other systems or other communities. The Board of Health will explore why this is so, and recommend ways to improve the dissemination and replication of the work of the Health Department.
- **GRASSROOTS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE HEALTH.** Community and neighborhood initiatives that were developed through Community Voices appear to be having a positive impact on health by connecting to people in new ways. The Board of Health will look at these grassroots efforts, exploring what people are doing and what they are learning about ways to improve lifestyle choices, enrolling the uninsured in coverage, and bypassing “red tape.” The Board of Health may be able to encourage replication of this approach, make these initiatives more vocal or visible, or advance it as a best practice for other service systems to adopt.
- **FOOD AND WEIGHT.** Obesity is a serious problem in our community and across the state. The Board of Health will examine current weight loss efforts in the community, the factors impeding access to nutritious food for people on low incomes, and strategies for improving access to food, healthy food choices, and exercise programs. Outreach for WIC and Food Stamp recipients will also be considered, along with the promotion of healthier food choices through supermarkets and restaurants
- **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.** Several important community concerns are being addressed by the Environmental Health unit, including land use, the rise in methamphetamine labs, and problems associated with tattoo parlors. The Board of Health will explore these issues through a presentation by Environmental Health staff, and/or select a particular issue for deeper focus and recommendation.