St. Clair County Health Department Encourages Participation in 2016 BRFS
Op-Ed

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Knowing where you are is a critical step in knowing where you are going next. Seems simple, but when it comes to understanding the health of a community, measuring our strengths and weaknesses can be pretty complicated. A *Community Health Needs Assessment* (CHNA) identifies the strengths and resources available in the community to meet the needs of everyone. The ultimate goal of a CHNA is to develop strategies to address the community's health needs and the identified issues. The health of the public is the responsibility of everyone, not just the local health department. It crosses all boundaries of government jurisdictions, agencies and people.

The Health Department has been privileged to be part of this process when it published its first CHNA in 2000. Every five years we have collected information that helped us understand our health status. This time we are hoping to push further to develop a robust *Community Health Improvement Plan* (or strategic plan). We want to thank the strong and widespread community support offered throughout this process from our hospitals, community agencies, and non-profits. By working together we can make the difference.

Starting mid-June through September one segment of the CHNA will be collected directly from St. Clair County residents using randomly selected land lines and cell phone numbers. This is called a "*Behavioral Risk Factor Survey* (BRFS)". In order to accurately reflect the whole community we need to collect about 1,200 completed surveys. The BRFS will be done by "Northern Illinois University Call Center" displaying an "815"area code. Trained professionals making the calls will ask questions related to health behaviors, social issues, chronic diseases, health care access, caregiving, literacy, substance use, and a few other topics. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes. The information is collected anonymously (it is separated from your phone number before anyone looks at it). The caller will <u>not</u> ask for social security numbers or credit card information. Only those 18 years or older will be randomly selected to take the survey. Zip codes and basic financial information, along with age, gender, marital status and race will be asked to help us understand how health is experienced by different groups of people. The BRFS is the single most important part of the CHNA because it reflects what is really going on with the people, from the perspective of the people. For those called, we are encouraging everyone to take the time to speak with the surveyors and give them thoughtful, honest answers. We need your help and input!

Once this segment is completed, additional data from other sources (census, business, health data, etc.,) will be added to give us the best picture of "where we are". This information will be published and available to everyone. Our expectation is that further community input as to "where to go next" will guide and strengthen our quest for St. Clair County "to be a community that is self-reliant and prepared for the future, allowing it to achieve the highest potential and wellbeing of its residents."

Best in health,

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