

**Data through decision to action.** Those are the steps the Steering Committee is taking to establish Carroll County's health priorities. We have completed the data stage, the most tedious stage, and we have seen the numbers generated by the collections mechanisms. The action stage will be the most exciting, where we can actually formulate some action plans. First, however, we must complete the most important phase of this project, the decision phase.

This decision phase is so important because it will develop the road map for our future actions. We will determine the priorities by ranking the health concerns of Carroll County citizens. Each member of the Committee will have input into this process and each will have their own opinions as to the priorities we set. These will be dictated by our background, profession and the community we serve. The challenge will be to look at Carroll County and help to determine which health areas are most critical, which health topics will have the greatest impact, what projects will benefit the most people and where can we contribute the most with the resources we may have.

Once this decision making is complete, the challenge of action will begin. Will we be able to be creative and design some effective action plans? Will we be innovative in our approach to the problems we will tackle? Will the work groups make a difference? After working with members of the Steering Committee and the support staff, I am convinced of a positive outcome. *The work has just begun!*

Arthur N. Riley, Chair  
Steering Committee

**FOCUS GROUPS** -- The purpose of the focus groups was to explore the health needs of the citizens of the Carroll County service area and potential ways to address those needs. It is important to understand that focus group research is qualitative in nature and cannot be projected to the larger population.

Three focus groups were conducted on November 4, 1996, with the following constituencies:

- Seniors (65-80+)
- Adolescents (13-17 years)
- Medically Indigent

Thirty-six individuals participated, with group sizes of 10-15 members.

\* **Seniors**

- Regular exercise, proper diet, staying mentally alert and getting regular check-ups are key to keeping in good health
- Most group members reported generally positive experiences with the quality of care, but felt rushed during a doctor visit, had difficulty in being unable to understand a foreign doctor's accent and felt more cooperation is needed between doctor and patient

- Focus group participants had adequate insurance coverage for their needs; however, many felt that billing is confusing
  - Prescription medication presents no problem
  - Transportation to doctors' appointments is an issue for those who don't drive
  - Respondents expressed frustration about the lack of quality alternatives for their loved ones
  - The Senior Center is crucial to the older population in terms of staying active and helping to ward off depression and loneliness
  - Abuse of seniors is a reality, both physical and financial
  - Personal safety is not an issue in this community
  - Ideas for Improvement of Services to Carroll County Seniors
    - Expand senior center hours
    - Build additional living quarters for seniors
    - Provide affordable transportation
    - Improve the quality and affordability of nursing homes

\* **Adolescents**

- Many of their peers are not in good health physically and many factors make emotional health difficult to assess
- Good nutrition is not a top concern due to today's lifestyles
- Organized activities other than sports are lacking
- Parents need to recognize and develop maturity in their teenagers; parents shouldn't stereotype all teens
- Adolescents recognized the importance of having an adult to talk to when a problem arises
- Crime and violence are not prevalent, but group members understand reasons behind violence
- Tobacco, alcohol and a variety of illegal drugs are available
- Teen pregnancy is significant and it can happen to anyone
- Education is important for the future; real people in your life can be good role models

\* **Medically Indigent**

- Good nutrition is important, but not always easy to understand and afford
- If you don't have insurance, good care is difficult to obtain
- Medicine (prescriptions) is not always affordable
- Dental and vision care are expensive
- It is easier to obtain medical care for kids under 18
- Routine preventive screenings are unavailable and unaffordable
- Those without a regular doctor use the emergency room
- Drug and alcohol problems are common and those treated for these problems feel discriminated against by medical personnel
- Westminster is safe, but not as safe as it was
- Good counseling is available at the mental health center within the Health Department
- #1 health need is access to medical care

Barbara Rodgers  
Carroll County Health Department

**PROVIDER SURVEYS** -- The Health Provider Survey is one part of the total Community Health Assessment Project for a Healthier Carroll County. Persons who responded to this survey were the persons working in the health care settings who are confronted daily with health care concerns.

It is important to remember that the following information is based on the respondents' perceptions of what the health care concerns are and what services are needed.

The Health Provider Survey was designed by the Atlantic Health Alliance and reviewed by Holleran Consulting and by your local Implementation Team prior to mailing. This same tool is being utilized by other Atlantic Alliance Hospitals, which enables us to look at health issues and concerns and compare ourselves to communities within the Alliance.

Two hundred surveys were distributed in mid-September 1996. The surveys were accompanied by a letter of introduction from our Chairperson, Art Riley, and endorsed by the physician members of the Steering Committee. One hundred and eighty surveys targeted physicians and provider organizations. Ninety-five surveys were returned, representing a 53% completion rate. Your Implementation Team also chose to target an additional twenty key agencies, an option open to us but not part of the Atlantic Alliance overall process.

The top five health priorities identified by the 95 health care providers were smoking, heart disease, drug abuse, cancer and mental health. Smoking has been identified as the leading cause of preventable disease and death. While the #1 cause of mortality was heart disease, Carroll County was recognized for its high incidence of cancer. Cancer was followed by mental health, because survey participants felt it was pervasive in nearly every family. Health care providers listed drug abuse as the third health priority because they felt it affects the greatest number of people directly and indirectly.

The top five health programs and services identified by health care providers were Preventive Health Care and Health Education, Health Care for Uninsured People, Substance Abuse Center/Program, Mental Health Services and Assisted Living.

Survey respondents felt prevention is the key and health education is the most cost effective way to reach all persons in the community. Health care concerns for uninsured people stressed that health care is a universal need. Therefore, it is essential that all residents of Carroll County have access to preventive and sick care.

The third priority was a condition specific center/program for substance abuse, which affects the entire community -- those who are addicted and those who are victims.

Professionals felt treatment for mental health services is costly and available to only those who can afford to pay, with limited access to services for those with Medical Assistance. With the increase in the elderly population, health care providers identified minimal assisted living services in the area.

The Carroll County Health Department was recognized by most health care professionals as potentially providing all of these services (except assisted living). Carroll County General Hospital was listed for preventive health care and substance abuse center/programs. Private physicians, the Carroll County Public Schools and numerous health agencies (American Heart Association, American Cancer Society, HMOs) also were identified as providing preventive health care and health education. Other community resources that could potentially provide services included the Mission of Mercy and the Carroll County Children's Fund for the health care of the uninsured; Junction, Re-Entry and Alcoholics Anonymous for substance abuse center/ program; and Locust House, Countryside Protective Care and Deerfield for assisted living.

Fran Miller  
Carroll County General Hospital

#### COMMENTS FROM OUR MEMBERS

*I am very interested in the information and statistics that have surfaced as a result of the Partnership effort. I think we will all be able to serve our community better as a result.*

Darlene Goodnow, Deerfield Senior Day Center

*Effort has brought to the attention of the community leaders the need for education; i.e., current resources. Amazingly well run!*

Sharon Baker, Carroll County Bureau of Aging

*As an active member of the GFWC Junior Woman's Club of Westminster, I consider it a privilege to have our organization represented in the Partnership issues for the residents of Carroll County have always been of concern for our members and our Homelife Department. Being a part of this community effort has afforded us the opportunity to direct our volunteer efforts towards helping to improve the health needs for our County. It has been a wonderful experience working and planning together with our neighbors in the community. The motivation and support from the Partnership has been extremely rewarding.*

Karen Feroli  
GFWC Junior Woman's Club of Westminster

*The Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County has already been a worthwhile endeavor. It has clearly illustrated the importance of ongoing communication between all agencies serving the citizens of Carroll County in order to share information about health care services which are needed and/or available.*

Cherie Jenkins  
League of Women Voters of Carroll County

*My participation in the Partnership project provided me with information that was new to me. It provided me the opportunity to view information/facts outside the scope of my formal work arena, thus providing me with a larger view of our community's status.*

Margaret Keiki  
Sykesville Eldercare Center

**NEXT ISSUE INCLUDES INFORMATION ON SELECTION OF HEALTH PRIORITIES TO BE ADDRESSED  
FOR MORE INFORMATION CONCERNING THE PARTNERSHIP, CALL 410-857-8741**