

Carroll County Times

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The Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County unveils community Health Needs Assessment results

By Alisha George Times Staff Writer

Obesity, diabetes and heart disease were listed as the top three health priorities that need to be tackled in the county during the unveiling of the Carroll County Community Health Needs Assessment results.

The findings were presented at the Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County's We're on Our Way Annual Community Forum Wednesday at The Portico of St. John in Westminster. Many nonprofits and community organizations were in attendance, including Carroll Hospital Center, Carroll County Health Department, Advanced Radiology and Access Carroll.

Jonathan O'Neal, assistant superintendent of administration for Carroll County Public Schools and member of the Partnership's board of directors, presented the 2012 assessment findings. The results will help the Partnership and Carroll Hospital Center as both entities plan future efforts.

"For the Partnership, we've tried to take the results, take the analysis of this data and incorporate that into our own strategic planning process," O'Neal said. "At the same time, the hospital center's strategic planning process, which is under way, will incorporate similar data into their five- to seven-year plan."

Data for the assessment was collected from household surveys and surveys sent to community leaders in civics groups, clergy, law enforcement and education. In an effort to reach all members of the community, there were designated focus group areas, including lower income families, older adults, blacks and non-English speaking populations in the county, O'Neal said.

"To make sure we were gathering data from all parts and all segments of our community," he said.

The assessment also looked at the core local indicator dashboard — an online data collection system — and health rankings of Maryland counties. General community data was taken into consideration, such as county demographics, hospital trend data, a Carroll County transportation survey and a local management board youth survey of middle school students and their parents, O'Neal said.

Twenty key issues were identified and narrowed down to seven priorities, which are obesity, diabetes, heart disease, mental health, cancer, lack of exercise and substance abuse.

“We took these seven and incorporated them into our community health improvement areas,” O’Neal said.

The assessment results will be guiding the organization’s work for the next three years.

“I think we’re very excited to have the data, very excited to implement the data into our strategic plan and the hospital is, as well,” he said.

In 2011, the board of directors at Carroll Hospital Center voted to authorize the Partnership to conduct the health needs assessment. The board of directors for the Partnership voted unanimously to lead that effort. This really grew from the mandate in the affordable health care act that hospitals complete a community needs assessment on a three year cycle, O’Neal said.

“I think regardless of our individual political leanings or our political feelings, it’s a more mature perspective to admit that not every aspect of any law is necessarily bad and the mandate to take a look at your community and do a needs assessment I think is a very good one,” he said.

The Partnership, given its composition and its reach into the community, was a perfect fit to lead that effort, O’Neal said. Maryland was introducing a state health improvement process around the same time, so all that came together.

Because the community needs assessment is completed on a three year cycle, the next time results will be announced at a yearly Partnership community forum will be in 2016.

Because of the newly identified priorities, the Partnership’s current seven leadership groups will be restructured into four new groups: chronic disease, behavioral health, access to health care services and elder health, according to Community Health Improvement Area Specialist Jayme Levy.

The forum Wednesday was an opportunity to promote what the Partnership does for the community, such as launch new health initiatives, she said.

“We want to get people involved,” she said.

The Partnership is having a “The Weight of the Nation” screening in September, which is a film about the obesity epidemic in America. There will also be a challenge to promote maintaining a healthy weight, but they have not yet decided what that challenge will be.

At next year’s community forum, the results of the challenge will be announced, Levy said.

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In other news

The Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County launched its revamped website today: www.healthycarroll.org

The **Worksite Wellness Award** was given to Carroll Lutheran Village for its commitment to improving the health of its residents and employees by making prevention and education a vital part of its workplace environment

The **Karen Kappes Feroli Community Champion Award** was given to John Ramming for his commitment and innovation in the development of The Courage Lion Program and for dedication to improving the quality life of individuals in the community.

The **2013 Dr. Janet Nelsen Award** was given to Advanced Radiology for its role in providing diagnostics and expert health care services to low income, uninsured and underinsured members of the community.