

## Partnership for a Lancaster County Public Health Department

A United Way of Lancaster County Community Impact Initiative

# Why We Need a Public Health Department in Lancaster County

### Background

Following a Children's Health Summit in 2003, a trio of retired Lancaster County physicians became involved in United Way of Lancaster County's Success By 6® initiative. With children's health as one of the primary impact areas Success By 6 sought to improve for youngsters, Drs. Robert Krissinger, Albert Price and Nikitas Zervanos soon zeroed in on the problem they had encountered in their own practices—a lack of coordination and communication across the medical delivery system.

They drew other doctors and healthcare professionals into the discussion and conducted more research, including a study done by Drexel University School of Public Health to verify the committee's findings and explore details on government regulations. Then a coalition—the Partnership for a County Public Health Department—was formed, and Hilda A. Shirk, PhD, MSW was contracted to serve as project manager. It quickly became apparent that the community health and safety of Lancaster County was being shortchanged with the absence of a local public health department.

### The Facts

Lancaster County is fortunate to have quality healthcare providers. It is hard to believe we are not working harder—and smarter—to prevent and control disease. National guidelines suggest we need a team of 12 to 20 public health workers to coordinate and integrate services for our county of almost 1/2 million people. What we have are restricted services from state agencies that are minimally staffed and overworked.

### It is probably no surprise that:

- Lancaster County has one of the highest rates for lead poisoning in the country.
- Lancaster County public swimming pools are only being inspected for water quality every two to five years. A recent inspection of City pools found all to be contaminated with fecal matter.
- Lancaster County has one of the highest obesity rates in America.

**Public health...protecting and improving the health of a community from exposures that will cause harm. To effectively address challenges to people's health, public health practice requires an organized and sustained population-based approach.**

—Excerpted from *Milestones in Public Health*, 2006  
Pfizer Global Pharmaceuticals, Pfizer, Inc., NY

- Lancaster County has the 24th worst air quality in the nation.
- Fewer than 20% of the County's 30 tattoo parlors are inspected regularly.
- Illnesses from vaccine-preventable disease are on the rise, as are sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea and chlamydia.

### An Investment with an Instant Return

There is a cost for creating a local health department—it is less than 50¢ per resident per year. Contrast that with the cost of not having one and the harm being done to our children, our families, our local businesses and our community. Most of the costs are covered by taxes Lancaster County residents are already paying to the state and federal governments and by other funding generated by fees, licenses and a county match.

### Expanding A Base of Support

United Way of Lancaster County is joined by other funding partners: Ephrata Community Hospital, Heart of Lancaster Regional Medical Center, Lancaster General Hospital, Lancaster Osteopathic Health Foundation, Lancaster Regional Medical Center and St. Joseph Health Ministries. The coalition also received a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

A steering committee was created, and new advocates joined the ranks:

Sally L. Craig, DO—Pennsylvania State University,  
Elizabethtown Board of Health  
Lamonte Garber—Environmental Consultant  
Vincent Glielmi, DO—Ephrata Community Hospital  
Sharon Greelish Cody—Lancaster Osteopathic Health Foundation  
Marla Konas, RN, CIC—Lancaster Regional Medical Center  
Robert Krissinger, MD—Retired, Private Practice  
Jim Laughman—Lancaster County Mental Health/  
Mental Retardation  
JoAnn Lawer, JD—Lancaster General Hospital

*continued...*

### *Expanding A Base of Support* continued...

Jeff Martin, MD—Lancaster City Board of Health,  
Lancaster General Hospital  
Albert Price, MD—Retired, Roseville Pediatrics  
Daniel Schlegel, MD—Lancaster General Hospital  
Carol Simpson—Manheim Township Board of Commissioners  
Charles Stream, PA-C—Drexel University  
Jennifer Thompson—St. Joseph Health Ministries  
Nikitas Zervanos, MD—Semiretired, Lancaster General Hospital

Other individuals and organizations also endorsed the concept of a Lancaster County public health department:

#### **Healthcare Providers**

LGH Family Medicine Residency Program  
Lancaster Emergency Medical Services Association (LEMSA)  
Lancaster Neuroscience & Spine Associates  
Schreiber Pediatric Rehab Center  
SouthEast Lancaster Health Services  
Stephen T. Olin, MD  
Walter L. Aument Family Health Center  
Welsh Mountain Medical and Dental Center

#### **Community Organizations**

The Hourglass Foundation  
Lancaster Area Advanced Practice Providers  
Lancaster City and County Medical Society  
Lancaster County Business Group on Health (an affiliate  
of The Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry)  
Lancaster County Immunization Coalition  
Lancaster County League of Women Voters  
Lancaster County School Nurses Association  
Lancaster Health Improvement Partnership  
National Committee for Amish Religious Freedom  
Project Access Lancaster County

#### **Others**

The City of Lancaster, Office of the Mayor  
Elizabethtown Borough  
Prof. Richard Fluck, Franklin & Marshall College  
Lancaster City Board of Health  
Joyce A. Nettke, Esq.  
School District of Lancaster

### **The Process**

February 2007 The Partnership for a County Public Health Department asks the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to send a letter to the PA Secretary of Health for a certificate of approval for Lancaster County to consider establishing a local public health department. This certificate is required by law prior to taking any action to create a department; it does not obligate the county to any further action.

February 2007 The Board of Commissioners approves the request and sends the required letter to the PA Department of Health.

March 2007 The Secretary of Health issues a certificate of approval.

Fall 2007 A series of public forums are held as part of an ongoing effort to raise awareness of public health issues in Lancaster County.

November 2007 Voters elect candidates in the general election, including all three seats on the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners.

Winter 2008 The Lancaster County Board of Commissioners decide whether to form a new Lancaster County Public Health Department.

### **What You Can Do**

1. Look at your own practice and identify ways a Lancaster County public health department could support your quality of care and your patients' health.
2. Share this information with us as we seek to further document the issues.
3. Contact us with any questions or concerns you might have about public health services.
4. Engage your colleagues, friends and patients in the conversation.
5. Lend your support to this cause by endorsing our work.
6. Talk to the Lancaster County Commissioner candidates and share your professional, real-life expertise on the issue.

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**Local Control, Local Response  
for Public Health and Safety**