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Health Department Launches Web Tools to Help Understand the County's Health

PITTSBURGH – As part of its ongoing efforts to be more data driven, the Allegheny County Health Department today launched two web-based tools that are available at www.achd.net. Both the Allegheny Community Indicators (ACI) dashboard and a comprehensive Community Health Assessment are designed to empower communities with information about their health and inform the Health Department's strategic efforts.

"This is a significant accomplishment for the Department, the Board of Health, our advisory coalition, and, most importantly, the populations we serve," said Health Department Director Dr. Karen Hacker. "Our best work is evidence-based work, and I am eager to use the most granular data we have to inform our programs, our policies, and our community partnerships."

The ACI dashboard contains a set of public health indicators, which are characteristics used to describe the health of a population. They include a wide variety of topics including chronic and infectious disease, income, mortality, and environmental factors. It was developed in collaboration with the Department's epidemiologists and Healthy Communities International (HCI), a company that has worked with a number of localities across the country to make health data available in an interactive, user-friendly fashion. The ACI dashboard reflects the most current available national, state, and county level data, and portrays how Allegheny County stacks up against national averages. For some indicators, the data can be broken down to the zip code, census tract, or municipal level. For others, only County-level data is available.

Given that public health data is always evolving, the Department plans to update new data sets as they become available, whether annually, monthly or in real time. This information will also enable the Department to better understand the needs of the residents and institute appropriate improvements initiatives accordingly. The ACI dashboard provides easy-to-understand information in a visual format. Access to the ACI benefits everyone from health professionals to residents who simply want to learn more about where they live. Users can switch from summaries to comparisons and make selections to receive specific details so the information seen is the information desired. These tools will enable all users to learn where we have been, where we are and where we hope to go to achieve our goal of becoming the healthiest county in the nation.

The Community Health Assessment (CHA) is the first of its kind for the Health Department. It is a comprehensive document that examines factors affecting our residents' health. Sources of information for this document include an online survey completed by over 1,000 residents of Allegheny County, feedback from 14 community meetings, the 2010 Allegheny Health Survey, statistics from the Health Department and other County agencies, as well as state and national datasets. The CHA examines topics as wide-ranging as sexually transmitted disease rates, air quality data, mortality statistics, and the incidence of chronic disease.

At a briefing today at the Department's downtown Pittsburgh administrative offices – 542 Fourth Avenue, Dr. Hacker and Health Department staff demonstrated how both tools can be used for monitoring,

research, advocacy, and cross-sectorial partnerships across the region. She was also joined by several members of the Advisory Coalition, who contributed research for the CHA and also ensured that the CHA reflected the diverse experiences and circumstances of various communities.

The Health Department also announced the launch of the next Allegheny County Health Survey. This survey, based on the Centers for Disease Control Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, uses random digit phone dial methodology. It will be conducted by the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. Questions will cover a variety of important health areas. Starting next month, School of Public Health representatives will conduct surveys with nearly 9,000 Allegheny County residents, who are urged to participate fully in the survey to inform their health future.

“We are very proud to be able to provide this information to the public, and look forward to the additional data that we will be able to gather through the Allegheny County Health Survey,” said Dr. Hacker. “This would not have been possible without the support of our contributing partners, especially the Highmark Foundation, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, the Richard King Mellon Foundation and the contributors to the Public Health Improvement Fund of the Pittsburgh Foundation. The contributions made by the Advisory Coalition to the Community Health Assessment were also invaluable and have led us to this announcement today.”

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