



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT: Melissa Wade
Public Health Information Officer
412-578-8312 office
412-339-7995 cell
mwade@achd.net

Violence Prevention from Public Health Perspective Efforts Receives Grant *Heinz Endowments Supports Unique Effort with \$500,000 in Funding*

PITTSBURGH – The Heinz Endowments is again lending its support to efforts to prevent violence with an announcement that it has awarded the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) a \$500,000 grant. The funding will be used to implement provisions of a [report](#) presented to the Allegheny County Executive at the end of 2014 by the 24-member Public Health Commission on Preventing Violence and Promoting Community Mental Health. The report’s recommendations and actions steps that focused on addressing violence as a public health issue. ACHD will work with the Department of Human Services and the City of Pittsburgh on initial steps.

“Gun violence requires more than a law enforcement response. Using a public health approach, we hope to support communities hardest hit by the issue” said Dr. Karen Hacker, Director of the Allegheny County Health Department. “We cannot solve the problems alone. The strategies we are using require community collaboration from multiple stakeholders including multiple community and faith-based organizations, government, police and schools.”

The public health approach focuses on populations and communities rather than individuals and on prevention rather than intervention. It takes a system approach and necessitates engagement across a broad group of stakeholders. In essence, such an approach assumes that street violence is similar to an infectious disease outbreak and that it can be prevented if the contributing risk factors are understood. That approach then allows for intervention with culturally-appropriate, evidence-based strategies.

“Gun violence has devastating consequences for individuals, families and entire communities,” said Heinz Endowments President Grant Oliphant. “Law enforcement alone is not enough. We need a holistic effort, so we are pleased to support the public health approach being launched by the Allegheny County Health Department that leverages the expertise of the affected communities in conjunction with proven prevention and intervention strategies. Over time we believe this all-hands-on-deck approach has the potential to curb a dynamic that disproportionately affects African American communities.”

The funding received will help support components of a broader multi-faceted approach that was outlined in the December 2014 Public Health Commission Report. Its efforts to prevent gun violence will include the hiring of a Violence Prevention Coordinator, the create of a Violence Prevention Community Advisory Board with wide representation of high-risk areas, the development of a Trauma Response Team to promote psychological and emotional wellness for residents affected by violence and Street Outreach Teams to focus on prevention of potential conflicts. The resources will also support the distribution of micro-grants to support neighborhood-specific violence prevention interventions.

“As we work collaboratively to address problems of violence, it only makes sense to approach it as a public health issue because it is preventable. The impact that violence has on children, families, and communities is devastating, and we should be doing everything within our power to identify and address root causes,” said Allegheny County Executive Fitzgerald. “We are appreciative of the funding from The Heinz Endowments and look forward to showing the results of these efforts moving forward, as well as having communities that are safe, secure and vibrant.”

In 2014, the homicide rate in the United States was 4.5 per 100,000, while the rate in Allegheny County was 8.5 per 100,000. The homicide rate in Allegheny County in 2015 was 9.3 per 100,000. The Health Department has carefully selected program strategies that are rooted in evidence that demonstrate measurable effects on violence, which allow for action now.

“Pittsburgh has long faced down its challenges through collaboration and innovation. There is no greater challenge facing our communities than the public health crisis that is gun violence,” Mayor William Peduto said. “I know by coming together we can address the gun-related fear and violence plaguing us.”

Individuals interested in applying to be a member of the Violence Prevention Community Advisory Board can contact the Allegheny County Health Department at 412-687-2243.

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About The Heinz Endowments

The Heinz Endowments is devoted to the mission of helping southwestern Pennsylvania prosper as a vibrant center of creativity, learning, and social, economic and environmental sustainability. Core to our work is the vision of a just community where all are included and where everyone who calls our region home has a real and meaningful opportunity to thrive.

KAREN HACKER, MD, MPH, DIRECTOR
ALLEGHENY COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT – PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
542 FOURTH AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15219
PHONE (412) 687-ACHD • FAX (412) 578-8325 • WWW.ACHD.NET

