

Community Health on MDI – What would a Healthy MDI look like?

Do you have health insurance? Do you hold a job simply because it provides health insurance for your family? Do you go for regular medical and dental check-ups or are you only able to go when there is a problem?

Are you able to walk or ride a bike to work? Can your children safely walk to school? Are they physically active or are they at home watching TV because you work and can't get off in time to take them to activities?

Are you eating healthy meals or because of time constraints and commuting, are you eating more fast food and snacks?

Do you or your children have asthma? Do you smoke? Do they? Does a family member smoke near them?

These are just some of the questions and issues the Community Health Workgroup of MDI Tomorrow has examined in trying to determine what factors support or threaten the health of our communities.

The Community Health Workgroup has framed four key factors that can make or break the health of our communities. These are: access to health care, health behaviors, physical environment and social justice.

MDI, like many areas across the state, is showing a dramatic increase in the number of families that have no health or dental coverage. According to a recent survey, an alarming 20% of Hancock County residents are uninsured. This greatly exceeds the state average estimated to be 13%-15%.

Hand in hand with access to healthcare is how well we take care of ourselves. It is of no surprise that our ability to eat well, be physically active, and be free of tobacco and other drug dependencies greatly determines our individual health and well being. But is it simply a matter of choice or will-power that determines our collective health?

We seem to prepare our children for a sedentary lifestyle from the start. They are often bombarded with images that encourage them to “supersize” it. They have precious little time to make healthy choices and eat lunch at school. Time spent with the TV, computer or game-boy is time not moving.

In Hancock County and across the State, 55% of us are overweight - the highest rate in New England.

More startling is the trend which shows adult obesity nearly doubled in Maine over the past decade (up from 12.2% in 1990 to 20% in 2000).

Obesity is second only to tobacco in individual health risk factors. With each overweight pound comes an increased risk of diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

Personal health habits aside, it appears we have unknowingly built our communities to the detriment of our health. Our collective waistline is sprawling along with our residential development. People who live in pre 1973 housing are 20 times more likely to be active than those who live in more recently built homes. Island development in the last 10 years has taken place away from village centers requiring more automobile use, less walking and biking.

Even in our communities where most places are near enough to walk or bike, people may not feel safe because of high motor vehicle speed, traffic volume and lack of adequate shoulders. Would a resident of Hulls Cove feel safe riding a bicycle a few miles into Bar Harbor to pick up groceries? Would a parent in Tremont allow their child to walk to school along Rt 102?

Traffic is not only frustrating; it is contributing to our poor air quality and the local increase in asthma and respiratory distress among children and the elderly.

While life in the greater MDI region has traditionally enjoyed a strong sense of community, changes in traditional family structures, rising costs of housing, increased time demands on families and isolated residential development have set the stage for a community divided, with people left behind.

Social justice is about equal access to the social, spiritual, educational and economic benefits a community has to offer. It's about relationships with our neighbors and the strength of our communities. The seasonality of our economy, lack of a year round public transportation, access to and availability of quality child care all contribute to our ability or inability to stay healthy, active, connected and well.

The MDI Tomorrow process is working to create a shared vision that will ensure all who grow, live and work in the MDI region have access to a healthy community. We sincerely hope to engage you to sharpen the vision for a healthy future.

Join us at the MDI Tomorrow Island-wide Conference on Saturday, Nov. 16th to hear the "State of the Island Address" and to prioritize the issues and opportunities most important to you.

Together, we can build health back into our communities. Just imagine some of the possibilities... a Community Health (insurance) Plan, bikeable roads, walkable sidewalks and kids who can breath freely, and grow up healthy and active in our vibrant communities.

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