

# HEALTH ACTION

## *Priorities for Monroe County*

Spring, 2009

### **Adult and Older Adult Health:** *Improve Nutrition and Increase Physical Activity*

#### **HEALTH ACTION Sets New Priorities for Adult Health**

In January, the Monroe County Board of Health selected three new priority health goals for Adult/Older Adult Health:

- Improve Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease
- Increase Physical Activity and Improve Nutrition
- Improve Mental Health (with focus on reducing violence and elder abuse)

The Adult/Older Adult Health Committee of **HEALTH ACTION** recommended these goals based upon feedback obtained during 29 community health forums (450 people) held this fall in Monroe County. Forum participants were given a presentation summarizing data and health goals from the Adult/Older Adult Health Report Card. They ranked the goals according to the following criteria: importance, likelihood that things can change and control. Participants were also asked the question: Which goal should be the Priority for Action?

The highest percentage of forum participants chose “**Increase Physical Activity and Improve Nutrition**” when asked “*Which goal should be the priority for action?*” Both forum participants and Committee members believe that improvement in this area will have an impact on obesity and the prevalence of chronic diseases. There is significant scientific evidence that increased physical activity and improved nutrition can prevent and improve management of chronic diseases. Research also shows that physical activity can improve mental health in addition to maintaining functional status and reducing falls among older adults.

“**Improve Management of Chronic Disease**” ranked high for all three criteria. This goal ranked high because of increasing chronic disease prevalence rates, the aging of the population, escalating medical care costs due to chronic diseases, and data from local health insurers showing low rates of controlled hypertension and diabetes. The Adult/Older Adult Health Committee decided to include “prevention of chronic disease” with this goal and focus additional efforts on identifying and treating precursors to chronic disease, such as metabolic syndrome.

“Reduce Violence” and “Reduce Elder Abuse” ranked high for “*importance*”, but ranked lower for “*likelihood that things can change*” and “*control*”. Both forum participants and Committee members noted that the causes of violence are mental health related issues including a sense of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and a lack of coping and conflict resolution skills. Similarly, risk factors for elder abuse include social isolation, caregiver stress, mental illness, and alcohol and substance abuse. Because the causes and risk factors for both of these goals are mental health related, the Committee recommended that the goal be “**Improve Mental Health (focusing on reducing violence and elder abuse)**”.

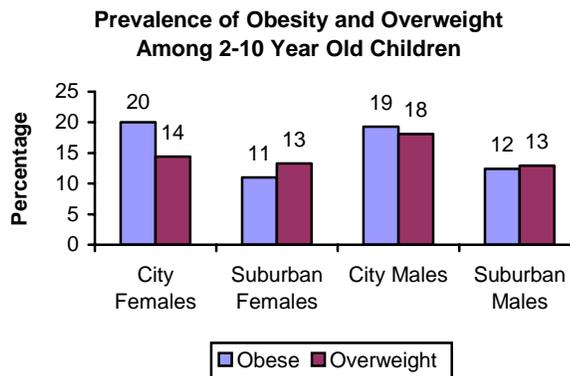
With the goals now selected, **HEALTH ACTION** will begin to identify partners that may be interested in playing a role in the community to develop interventions.

**Maternal-Child Health Priority:**  
*Improve Nutrition and Increase Physical Activity*

## Baseline for Childhood Overweight and Obesity

The results of a surveillance study on childhood obesity in Monroe County were released in January, 2009. The study found that approximately 15% of Monroe County's children (ages 2 through 10 years) are obese and another 15% are overweight (therefore 70% of Monroe County children in this age range are at a healthy weight).

Rates of overweight and obesity are significantly higher in the city compared to the suburbs .



The study was performed by Dr. Stephen Cook and colleagues in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Rochester Medical Center. The data were collected from measurements done in the offices of local child health care providers.

The study was funded by the Greater Rochester Health Foundation (GRHF). The foundation has selected prevention of childhood obesity as one of its priorities for funding. The foundation has funded prevention efforts in schools, in child care settings, Head Start, clinical office practices, in the media, and in other community settings.

"These baseline data form the starting point for a ten year effort in our community to reduce childhood overweight and obesity," said Bonnie Devinney, GRHF Chief Program Officer. Our goal is to increase the percentage of children at a healthy weight from 70% to 85% by 2017.

For more information go to [www.thegrhf.org](http://www.thegrhf.org).

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## **Maternal-Child Health Priority:**

*Improve Social and Emotional Well-Being and Reduce Child Abuse*

### **Monroe County to Construct New Building to Serve Foster Care Families**

Monroe County will construct a new building to serve children and families in foster care. The new building will be built on the property of the Monroe Community Hospital campus.

The facility will house a pediatric practice for children in foster care and a center in which children in foster care can visit with their biological parents in a supervised setting. At any given time, there are between 700 and 800 Monroe County foster care children placed with families.

A strategy to improve the social and emotional well-being of children in Monroe County must have multiple components. Part of the strategy should be to improve the social and emotional well-being of average children. However, another component of the strategy must be to focus on the population with greatest need. Arguably, the children in the foster care system are the children with greatest challenges to their social and emotional well-being.

"Monroe County is demonstrating its commitment to improving child social and emotional well-being by sponsoring this project," said County Executive Maggie Brooks.

The medical portion of the facility will be paid for by a grant from the New York State Health Department. The visitation center will be funded with a combination of county funds and private donations. The Monroe County Legislature approved the funding plan and a contract for design of the center at its meeting on Feb 3, 2009.

Currently, the services for these children and their families are provided in multiple locations in Monroe County. "The current service system is inefficient and often confusing for families," said Kelly Reed, Monroe County Commissioner of Human Services.



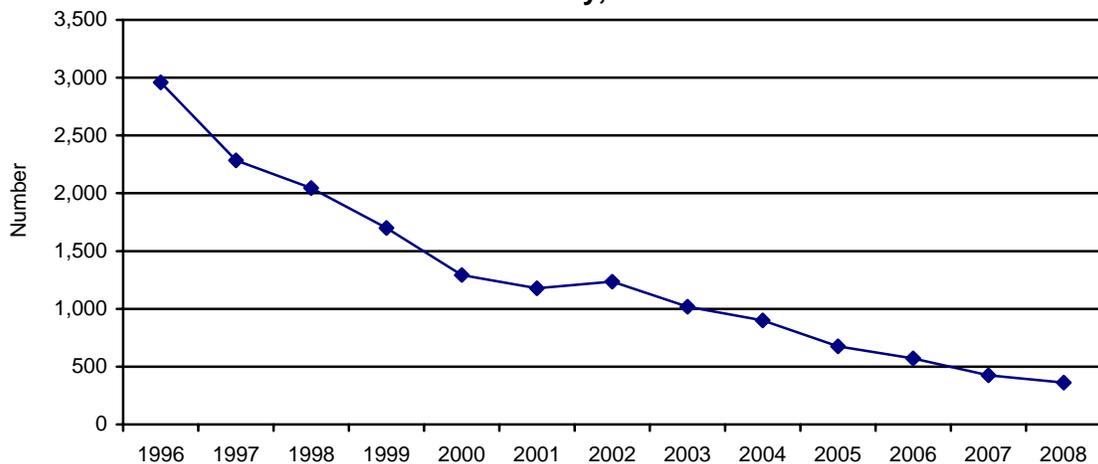
**Environmental Health Priority:**  
*Reduce Hazards in the Home*

## New Data Show Further Declines in Childhood Lead Poisoning

The number of children in Monroe County with lead poisoning continued its steady downward trend in 2008. Thirty-two children had lead levels above 20 (micrograms per deciliter) and 363 children had levels at or above 10ug/dl. The number at or above 10ug/dl is down markedly from nearly 3,000 cases in 1996.

In 2001, federal health officials announced a national goal to eliminate childhood lead poisoning by the year 2010. "While it does not appear that we will eliminate lead poisoning by 2010, our community's collaborative efforts have resulted in truly remarkable gains," said Dr. Andrew Doniger, Monroe County Health Director (see chart).

**Children With Lead Levels  $\geq$  10ug/dl,  
Monroe County, 1996-2008**



Because experts believe that there is no "safe level" of lead for children, on-going efforts will be needed to further reduce lead poisoning.



## HEALTH ACTION STEERING COMMITTEE

African-American Health Coalition  
Excellus Blue Cross/Blue Shield  
Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency  
Greater Rochester Health Foundation  
Latino Health Coalition  
Monroe County Department of Public Health  
Monroe County Medical Society  
Rochester Business Alliance  
Rochester General Health System  
Preferred Care  
Unity Health System  
University of Rochester Medical Center

## HEALTH ACTION Priorities

### Maternal//Child Health

- Increase Physical Activity and Improve Nutrition
- Improve Social and Emotional Well-being and Reduce Child Abuse

### Adolescent Health

- Increase Physical Activity and Improve Nutrition
- Build Youth Assets to Promote a Healthy Lifestyle

### Adult/Older Adult Health

- Increase Physical Activity and Improve Nutrition
- Improve Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease
- Improve Mental Health (focus- reduce violence & elder abuse)

### Environmental Health

- Improve Water Quality
- Reduce Industrial Pollution
- Reduce Pollution from Small Businesses
- Reduce Hazards in the Home

[www.HealthAction.Org](http://www.HealthAction.Org)

