

VIII. NEXT STEPS FOR THE COMMUNITY AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The RHC is committed to taking immediate action to improve access to care and reduce health disparities by supporting the efforts of existing organizations in our community. We are proactively seeking partners for this work and have already begun efforts with several organizations as listed in Section VI of this report. We also invite any organization that is working to improve health in our region to contact us to see how the RHC may be able to lend support to your efforts.

The RHC is also committed to finalizing a “business plan” by the end of 2003 for improving the way primary and specialty safety net care is delivered in St. Louis City and Saint Louis County. In 2004, the RHC will release recommendations for prevention, health education, and public health services according to the following schedule:

April 2003

Building A Healthier St. Louis (Primary and Specialty Care)

July 2003

Initial recommendations for improving the health care safety net of St. Louis City and Saint Louis County (Primary and Specialty Care)

December 2003

Final plan and implementation strategy (Primary and Specialty Care)

January–December 2004

Implementation activities (Primary and Specialty Care)

June 2004

Situational analysis and strategic recommendations for improving prevention, health education, and public health services in St. Louis City and Saint Louis County

Given the findings in this report, the St. Louis community faces difficult questions in the near future, including:

- How should the safety net system be organized in the future?
- How should the safety net system be financed?
 - How can we leverage and better utilize existing resources?
 - What new sources of revenue are available to stabilize the system?
- How can we increase access to care? How can we enable more people to use the resources already available in the community?
- How can we increase resources in areas of critical shortage for those most in need?
- What interventions will be most effective in improving health outcomes and reducing health disparities? How as a community can we best target our limited resources to make the most impact?

In July 2003, the RHC will begin to recommend solutions to these questions. Given the current economic environment, there will be no easy answers.

However, the findings of this report clearly indicate that:

- St. Louis City and Saint Louis County lag behind the nation and the State of Missouri in certain key health status indicators.
- Disparities in health outcomes are significant in our region.
- The safety net system is fragmented and is not financially sustainable in the long term without major change.
- A sufficient amount of primary care service is available in our community; however, barriers to accessing these resources are significant and require coordinated, dedicated action to correct.
- A lack of specialty care resources exists for safety net patients that significantly impacts access to these services for those most in need.
- The current fiscal environment for safety net services is very challenging, requiring unprecedented coordination of resources to even maintain the current level of service in the near term.

In February 2002, the St. Louis community was “Called to Action”^{8.1} to improve health care for all in our region. This report confirms that significant and systemic change is needed to build a healthier St. Louis. The RHC has accepted the charge to coordinate a response to this Call to Action in the months to come.

However, meaningful and lasting change cannot occur without the active involvement of health care providers, community groups, associations, labor unions, businesses, neighborhoods, and citizens of the region. Over 100 organizations have already contributed to the work of the RHC through this report, and the RHC has drawn heavily on the voices of the community heard in sessions held by the RHC and other organizations over the past months.

We invite the community to continue to participate in this effort in the following ways:

- Attend RHC community input events this spring and summer.
- Ask a Commissioner or RHC staff member to speak and listen to you at a meeting of your neighborhood or community group.
- Attend our meetings—all are open to the public and times and locations are posted on our web site at www.stlrhc.org.
- E-mail your thoughts and comments to us at info@stlrhc.org, or send them to us at 4236 Lindell Blvd, Suite 207, St. Louis, MO 63108.

The RHC is committed to improving access to health care, reducing health disparities, and improving health outcomes for the citizens of St. Louis City and Saint Louis County.

We look forward to you joining us in this effort.