



**PARTNERSHIP FOR A  
HEALTHY COMMUNITY**

**Community Health Needs Assessment  
Executive Summary  
2001-2002**

**Compiled by the  
Atlantic County Division of Public Health  
From data collected by  
Holleran Consulting, York PA**

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## **Introduction**

The Partnership for a Healthy Community is a community-based coalition whose mission is to create a “scoreboard” on the health status of the community and to align community stakeholders to the common purpose of improved health. Sponsors of the Partnership include Atlantic Cape Community College, Atlantic City Health Department, Atlantic County Division of Public Health, AtlantiCare, Bacharach Institute for Rehabilitation, Shore Memorial Hospital, United Way of Atlantic County and William B. Kessler Memorial Hospital.

In 2001, the Partnership contracted with Holleran Consulting to conduct a community health assessment as a follow up to a similar study conducted in 1996. The purpose of this study was to obtain feedback from area residents regarding their health status, access to healthcare and their perception of community services. The 2001/2002 study included residents of Atlantic County and surrounding areas in Camden and Cape May counties that are serviced by Atlantic County hospitals. Appendix A contains a complete listing of the survey areas by zip code.

## **Methodology**

This study was patterned on a classic needs assessment model which includes five phases.

### **Phase One: Committee Orientation**

Partnership sponsors met on September 13, 2001 to review assessment objectives, establish project timeline and discuss survey logistics.

### **Phase Two: Statistical Research**

The first research component, a *secondary data profile*, was completed in October 2001. This profile contains current health and wellness statistics compiled from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Census Bureau, among others. This profile identified the health status of area residents compared to those in other parts of the state and the nation. In addition, the profile was used in the development of the household survey instrument.

The second research component, a *community household survey*, contained questions similar to those used in the 1996 survey. Data collection, which included both written and telephone surveys, began in October 2001 and was completed in February 2002. A total of 984 residents completed the survey resulting in an accuracy rate of +/- 3.1% at the 95% confidence level.

### **Phase Three: Qualitative Research**

Following completion of the statistical research component, *focus groups* were held involving two subgroups identified in the survey. One group included African Americans and focused on heart disease and weight control issues. The other group included Hispanic women and focused on health issues for women and children.

### **Phase Four: Strategic Planning**

Results from the preceding research phases were presented at a strategic planning session involving the Partnership’s steering committee and other key community members. This session allowed participants to prioritize health needs and set action plans for addressing those needs.

## **Phase Five: Implementation and Evaluation**

The results of this study will be used to focus activities around prioritized health issues and to continue tracking health trends throughout the region.

## **Key Research Findings**

### **Health Status**

- 51% of respondents said they would generally describe their health as “excellent” or “good”. In the 1996 Partnership survey, nearly 60% of respondents said they were in “excellent” or “good” health.

### **Physical/Mental Limitations**

- 18% of respondents indicated that they are limited by physical, mental or emotional problems.
- Nearly 5% of respondents have been told by a health professional that they have a mental illness. Of this number, 71% are currently receiving treatment. For those not in treatment, the most common reason was that the doctor said treatment is complete or they have no insurance.
- 42.5% of those who have been told they have mental illness are currently employed.

### **Access to Health Care**

- 92% of respondents have health coverage; that number is similar to the 1996 Partnership statistic of 94% and greater than the national rate of 86%.
- Of those without health insurance, the most common reason for being uninsured is cost.
- 78% of respondents have had a routine physical check up in the past year. This is above the national percentage and equivalent to the New Jersey statistic and the percentage in 1996.
- 90% of respondents have one person they think of as their personal doctor. This is above the rest of the nation and in accord with the Healthy People 2010 objective and with the 1996 Partnership results.

### **Men’s Health**

- Almost half (47%) of the male respondents indicated that they have never had an examination for testicular cancer.
- 31% of male respondents have never had an examination for prostate cancer.

### **Tobacco and Alcohol Use**

- More respondents (59%) are likely now not to smoke at all compared to the rest of the nation (52%) and New Jersey (52%).
- 46% of current respondents indicated that they have never smoked in their lifetime. In 1996, the percentage of those who had never smoked was 37%. (Note: there were variations in the wording of this question in the 1996 and 2002 surveys.)
- 54% of respondents have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime. This is higher than the national percentage (47%) and the New Jersey percentage (52%).
- 62% of respondents have had at least one drink of alcohol in the past month. This is similar to the national percentage.
- Of those respondents who have had alcohol in the past month, 16% reported at least one binge-drinking episode in the past month. This is similar to the national percentage.

### **Personal Safety**

- 93% of respondents have a smoke detector on each floor of their homes. This percentage is higher than in 1996 when 90% of respondents said they had smoke detectors on each floor of their homes.
- 20% of respondents keep a firearm in their homes. Of those homes with a firearm, 16% keep it loaded and unlocked.
- 81.5% of respondents say they “always” wear a seatbelt.

### **Children’s Health**

- 95% of the respondents with children indicated that they have health insurance.
- Of those respondents who have had a child in the past year, 2.7% indicated that their baby had a low birth weight.
- 3.5% of the respondents with children said their child/children have been diagnosed with elevated blood lead levels.

### **Spirituality**

- 84% of respondents indicated that spirituality is “very” or “fairly” important to them. This number is higher than in 1996 when 75% of respondents said religion was “very” or “fairly” important.

## **Community**

- 54% of employed respondents indicated that their employer offers a comprehensive health promotion program. The largest proportion of these employees work for a company that employs 750 or more people.
- 87% of respondents rated their community's recycling efforts as "excellent" or "good".
- 78% of respondents rated their community's water quality as "excellent" or "good".
- 75% of respondents rate the quality of public education in their community as "excellent" or "good".
- 73% of respondents rate the quality of health care services in their community as "excellent" or "good".
- 92% of respondents said they feel hopeful about the future. In 1996, 67% of respondents said they feel hopeful for the future.
- 55% of respondents indicated that they believe it is "not very likely" that they or their family could contract anthrax.
- When asked if they trust their local health department for information about bioterrorism, 22% of respondents answered "very much", 61% of respondents answered "somewhat" and 17% answered "not at all".

## **Senior Citizens**

- 40% of responding senior citizens said they have received prescription medication from more than one doctor in the past year and 16% of respondents use more than one pharmacy for their medication needs.
- 64% of responding senior citizens indicated that they know where the senior citizen center is in their community. Of those individuals, 78% say they do not use the senior center. The most common reason why the senior center is not used is that the respondent "never thought about it before".
- 18% of responding senior citizens report using public transportation in the past year and 13% of respondents have used prescription assistance.
- 88% of responding senior citizens indicate that they get information about news in their community from newspapers.

## **Areas of Opportunity**

Upon review of the research results, six key areas were identified in which statistics show that special attention may be needed. These include cardiovascular disease, weight control, women's health, dental health, illegal drug use and sex education. Key findings in each of these areas are summarized below.

### **Cardiovascular Disease**

- 35% of those respondents who have had their blood pressure checked report having high blood pressure. This is significantly higher than the national statistic of 25%.
- Over 21% of respondents have not had their cholesterol checked within the past five years. Nationally, only 6% of individuals have not had a cholesterol check in five years.
- Nearly 40% of respondents who have had a cholesterol check report that their cholesterol is high. The national percentage of individuals with high cholesterol is 31% and the 1996 Partnership study indicated that only 18% of respondents had high cholesterol.
- 7.5% of respondents said that a doctor has told them they have angina or coronary heart disease. Nationally, only 4.6% of individuals have been told they have these diseases.

### **Weight Control**

- 65% of the respondents are either overweight or obese (based on body mass index calculations of participant height and weight). Nationally, 56% of individuals fit these categories.
- 34.5% of respondents indicated that they have not exercised in the past month. This is above the national figure of 28%.
- Half of all respondents report that they are currently trying to lose weight. Only 39% of individuals across the nation report current weight loss attempts.
- 22% of respondents said that in the past year someone has told them to lose weight. Nationally, only 12% of individuals make that claim.

### **Women's Health**

- 93% of responding women age 40 and over report having had a mammogram at some point. This is higher than New Jersey's figure of 86%.
- Of the women who have had a mammogram, 69% report that it was done in the past year. That number is 10% lower than the state figure.
- 71% of responding women age 40 and over have had a clinical breast exam in the past year. The national figure is 79%.

- 89% of responding women report having had a pap smear in the past three years. This is close to the Healthy People 2010 objective of 90%.
- Half of the women responding said they conduct a monthly self breast exam.

### **Oral Health**

- 32% of respondents have not visited a dentist in the past year. This is significantly higher than the 1996 survey finding of 20%.
- Over 35% of respondents do not have any dental insurance.

### **Illegal Drug Use**

- 27% of all respondents claim they have used marijuana, heroin or other illegal drugs at least once. This is significantly more than the 1996 Partnership study which reported that only 15% of respondents had ever used illegal drugs.
- Among those who have ever used illegal drugs:
  - Highest rates of drug use occurred among those who are 35-44 years old.
  - Slightly more men (29%) than women (25%) report ever using illegal drugs.
  - The largest proportion of drug users has an annual income of at least \$35,000.
  - The likelihood of ever using drugs increased among people with higher education levels; the highest proportion was among college graduates.
- 3.1% of respondents report having used marijuana, heroin or other illegal drugs in the past six months. This is equivalent to the 1996 Partnership study.
- Among those who report using illegal drugs in the past six months:
  - The 18-24 age group comprises the largest proportion of recent users.
  - There is no difference between rates of recent drug use in men and women.
  - No differences were observed between education levels.

### **Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

- When asked how effective they thought a condom is for preventing HIV infection, 40.5% of respondents claimed it was very effective, 37% said it was somewhat effective, 3.6% said it was not at all effective and 18% did not know (significantly more than the national figure of 11%).
- 38% of respondents who have had more than one sexual partner in the past year report that they did not use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.
- In looking at the population of the study area, this translates into 9,962 individuals in the region who have multiple sexual partners and are not using condoms.

## **Focus Group: Hispanic Mothers Address Women and Children's Health**

- Participants report worrying about a lack of adequate health insurance (both medical and dental).
- Spanish-speaking individuals often face language barriers in accessing healthcare.
- Participants indicated that they often cannot afford to pay for prescriptions.

## **Focus Group: African Americans, Heart Disease and Weight Control**

- Participants said that lack of transportation and health insurance are barriers to obtaining proper healthcare.
- Participants said that diet and nutrition information needs to be a more integral part of their children's education.
- The group suggested holding more community events, health fairs and employer-sponsored health activities in addition to free health screenings at churches and community centers.

## **Racial Differences**

- Hispanics and Asians are less likely to view their health as 'excellent' or "good" compared to others.
- Hispanics and Asians are less likely to have had their blood pressure measured within the past two years compared to others.
- Asians are less likely to have had their cholesterol checked within the past five years compared to others
- African Americans are more likely to have had a stroke compared to others.
- Whites are more likely to have had skin cancer compared to others.
- Whites and African Americans are more likely to have been told they have arthritis compared to others.
- Hispanics are more likely to have days in the past month where their mental health was not good compared to others.
- Hispanics are less likely to have any kind of health coverage compared to others.
- Hispanics are less likely to have one person they think of as their personal doctor compared to others.
- Hispanics are more likely to have not taken a prescribed medication because they could not afford it compared to others.
- African Americans and Asians are less likely to have visited a dentist in the past year compared to others.

- Hispanic women are more likely to have had cervical cancer compared to other women.
- Hispanic women are more likely to have never had a clinical breast exam or a self breast exam compared to other women.
- Hispanic women are less likely to have had a pap smear in the past year compared to other women.
- African Americans are more likely to be obese compared to others.
- African Americans and Hispanics are less likely to have exercised in the past month compared to others.
- African Americans are more likely to eat no servings of fruits in an average day compared to others.
- Hispanics and Asians are more likely to now smoke cigarettes everyday compared to others.
- Whites are more likely to have had an alcoholic drink in the past month compared to others.
- Asians and Hispanics are more likely to have had a binge-drinking episode in the past month compared to others.
- Hispanics are more likely to have children without health insurance compared to others.
- Hispanics are less likely to have gotten all recommended vaccinations for their children compared to others.
- Hispanics are more likely to have children with elevated blood lead levels compared to others.
- Whites are less likely to have used a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse compared to others.
- Whites and Asians are less likely to have been tested for HIV compared to others.

## **Gender Differences**

The survey revealed that, compared to women, men are more likely to have the following:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Heart attack
- HIV or AIDS
- Obesity
- A drink of alcohol in the past month
- A binge drinking episode in the past month

The survey also shows that, compared to men, women are more likely to have the following:

- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Days in the past month when their mental health was not good
- Not taken prescribed medication because they could not afford it
- Used sunscreen outdoors
- Used a seatbelt
- Attended religious services
- Believed it is “somewhat likely” that they or their family could contract anthrax

## **Health Priorities**

During the strategic planning session, the Partnership's steering committee and other key community members reviewed the study results and compiled the following priority areas: heart disease, access to healthcare and health insurance, preventive health screenings, dental care, women's health issues and the shortage of health professionals.

After considering each priority area, both in terms of the need and the ability to stimulate change and community passion, the group decided upon the following primary goal:

**To reduce heart disease among all groups,  
especially among minority populations**

Several key indicators can be used to measure progress under this goal. These indicators include diet, smoking, diabetes, weight control/obesity, blood pressure, stress and cholesterol.

Partnership sponsors plan to host health forums involving agencies, organizations and individuals from various community groups. These forums will focus on the issue of cardiovascular disease with the goal of engaging these community groups in implementing activities addressing one or more of the key indicators of heart disease. The Partnership will also seek to maximize resources and foster more effective communication among community groups by identifying best practices and existing services related to heart disease.

***For additional information regarding the Partnership for a Healthy Community  
or the 2001-2002 Community Health Needs Assessment, call the  
Atlantic County Division of Public Health at 609-645-5935.***

## Appendix A

Zip Code	Number of Respondents	Zip Code	Number of Respondents	Zip Code	Number of Respondents
02145	1	08215	1	08317	1
08004	12	08221	6	08319	3
08009	19	08223	12	08326	12
08037	93	08225	8	08330	43
08050	1	08226	38	08341	11
08075	1	08230	1	08361	1
08080	1	08232	68	08401	127
08081	57	08234	104	08402	13
08082	1	08241	2	08403	2
08089	12	08243	6	08406	49
08094	3	08244	34	08830	1
08201	117	08247	2	19008	1
08202	2	08250	1	33484	1
08203	37	08251	33	Blank	9
08205	1	08270	36	Total	984