

SECTION III

CONCLUSION

This report explores community health using a model adapted from the RAND Corporation's *California Health Report*, published in 2000. The model was designed to provide an alternative way to think about and perhaps approach community health. This method emphasizes that a broad understanding of the multi-determinants of health can assist individuals and organizations to identify action they can take within their families, businesses, communities, workplaces, and schools—keeping in mind that community health requires mutual responsibility and support of an entire community.

This report underscores the following points:

- Some risk factors are more pervasive and contributory to health status than others. These risk factors represent the points of greatest leverage for effective prevention and intervention and for the greatest potential gains in community health status.
- The High-Leverage Health (HLH) Issues are complex and recalcitrant to change. They are likewise extensively inter-connected (e.g., poor nutrition is a risk factor for depression, and depression is a risk factor for poor nutrition).
- HLH issues require cross-disciplinary strategies with a broad base of support.

The HLH issues identified in this report—Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Healthy Behaviors, and Access to Care—are corroborated at the local, state, and national levels. It is not surprising that the multi-determinant study of the health of San Diego County in this report parallels much of the findings in the research and confirms what the World Health Organization considers to be major burdens of disease or what the U.S. Surgeon General suggests are current or emerging epidemics. Nor is it a coincidence that major emphasis has been placed on these issues within our local public health and human service agencies and that even Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) previously developed specific workgroups for each of these areas in response to the community's input.

Although it is not within the scope of this Needs Assessment to propose a blueprint for action, two overarching conclusions emerge from this report:

1. San Diego County's major health issues require a collaborative approach among all sectors of our community.
2. Local efforts should be consistent with the Guidelines for Effective Planning described in this report.

In addition to these general conclusions, several key questions help to frame subsequent discussions about this report:

- What “high-leverage” actions are needed to begin to address the High-Leverage Health issues identified in this report?
- What visions and values are guiding current community-health-improvement efforts around the County?
- How can the San Diego County health care community better develop, share, and disseminate health information?

San Diego County is one of the most “partnership and collaborative-friendly” counties in the state and perhaps the nation. The CHIP organization itself is a model for the State of California. Within and throughout San Diego County, significant efforts have been and are being made to improve the community’s health—from action directed by the Board of Supervisors relative to mental health, aging, and access to care, to individual organizations such as the outcomes research efforts of our local United Way.

The Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP) is well positioned to initiate and foster productive dialogue and action around these conclusions and questions, but all sectors of the community and San Diego County’s health care leadership must play a role for significant progress to occur.