

POLICY SOLUTIONS

Building Healthy Communities

What is the Problem:

The issue of overweight and obesity is a serious national health epidemic, and here in Berrien County, 31.1% of the population is considered obese. Our number of obese residents is higher in comparison to the state of Michigan (26.2%) and the nation (24.4%). Not only are our adults getting heavier, but so are our children. The percentage of children and teens that are overweight has doubled since the 1970s.

These increasing rates raise concern because of their implications for our community's health. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions including diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer.

Needed Outcomes:

Unhealthy eating, physical inactivity and tobacco exposure are three risk factors that contribute significantly to the development of many chronic diseases. By creating an environment that makes it easy for people to buy and eat healthy food, be physically active, and not smoke, we can greatly improve the health of our community.

Current Solutions:

Berrien County Health Department, with collaboration from the We Can! Healthy Berrien and the Healthy Berrien Consortium, has been chosen as one of ten recipients statewide of a Building Healthy Communities Planning Grant. The purpose of the Building Healthy Communities project is to implement evidence-based policy and sustainable environmental changes that support health, such as opening farmers markets and building walking and biking trails, through a strategic process. BCHD has been awarded money to begin planning these activities.

The Health Department has chosen Benton Harbor/Benton Township as its target community for the Building Healthy Communities project. Related activities include:

- sustain a coalition of diverse partner organizations committed to participating in the planning, implementing and evaluating chronic disease prevention efforts as part of the Building Healthy Communities program.
- Conduct assessments of the community to assist in the action planning. MDCH provides assessment tools for this under www.mihealthtools.org
- Develop a 3-year community action plan to increase activity, increase healthy eating and decrease smoking in Benton Harbor/Benton Township

What Can You DO to help?

Community members from diverse backgrounds are needed to make this project successful. Policy makers, residents, health professionals, city leaders, developers, and farmers are only a few examples of the unique talent needed to find creative solutions to this problem. If you would like to find out how you can make a difference; how you can improve the health of your community by changing your environment, contact

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