

County promotes health initiatives

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By: Caitlin Schudalla, The Norman Transcript

On Tuesday, the Cleveland County Turning Point Coalition discussed a five-year plan to improve the health of local residents.

Titled the Cleveland County Community Health Improvement Plan, the community wellness plan will operate under the leadership of the Norman Regional Health System. It is built on three priority areas which, if manifested in local governmental policies, will greatly improve the overall health of Cleveland County.

The three priority areas are tobacco use prevention, obesity reduction and child health. The plan represents the collaboration of a large number of subcommittees, coalitions and communities.

The coalition's goals include reducing the county's adult smoking rate, increasing the county's fruit and vegetable consumption by 4 percent and increasing the county's immunizations in children younger than 3 years old by 5 percent, all by the year 2016.

Oklahoma Commissioner of Health Dr. Terry Cline was one of the meeting's special guests. He praised the uniqueness of the coalition's collaboration with local communities as "the first in the state."

"National and state data, as well as goals and challenges we need to set before our communities are all relative, but you've set the bar very high," Cline said.

Among the meeting's speakers was CCTP member Gail Hilty, who has served on a number of health and wellness committees for years and championed the adoption of a 24/7 no tobacco policy in the Noble and Moore school districts.

Hilty described the process of enacting this policy in her hometown of Noble, emphasizing that—in spite of its perceived difficulty—achieving the implementation of this policy was very doable.

"With some gentle reminders and simple notices like signs and announcements in local papers and newsletters, enforcement of this policy was painless. We found that respectfully giving knowledge to our citizens resulted in respectful compliance," Hilty said. "Social norm changes only occur with changes to community policy."

Though health improvement may have a positive impact on the community's environment and health costs, better quality of life for Cleveland County residents was the main impetus of the plan.

"Making these changes will save lives," Cline said.

For more information, visit the Oklahoma State Department of Health's website at www.ok.gov/ health and search "Cleveland County Turning Point."