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Section: News

PBS series starting Thursday night will examine health care inequalities

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Why does the most powerful nation in the world have worse health outcomes than many other nations, despite spending more than twice the amount of money per person on health care? How does racial discrimination impose an additional health burden at all income levels? And how do the social conditions in which people are born, live and work affect health and longevity?

A new Public Broadcasting Service documentary series, "Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?" examines these questions, challenges current beliefs about health and offers new remedies to address health care issues. The four-hour series will air from 9 to 10 p.m. on OETA PBS on consecutive Thursdays from March 27 to April 17.

The Carter County Health Department will join the Oklahoma State Department of Health, Oklahoma State **Turning Point** Council, the University of Central Oklahoma and OETA in viewing and discussing the series and seeking community input on the causes and potential solutions to socioeconomic and ethnic inequities in health care.

Currently, an estimated 47 million Americans, including about 700,000 Oklahomans, lack health care. The series discusses what makes people ill, and then questions why economic status, race and zip codes are more powerful predictors of health status than life expectancy and smoking.

Past public health improvements were tied to improving individual behaviors through new drugs, medical technology and public policy reforms like child labor laws. This series takes a look at factors that are now necessary to improve health, yet are beyond individual control, including improvements in land use, transportation and business investment in poor neighborhoods, as well as safe streets, family leave and wage improvements.

"As health inequality grows, we have begun to see a decline in U.S. life expectancy," Carter County Health Department Administrative Director Mendy Spohn said. "We are seeking public input and discussions from our local community about ways to improve Oklahoma's health care system while controlling the costs of health care."

After watching the documentary series, viewers are invited to join the health department discussions by contacting Spohn at (580) 223-9705.