

# Minority Health Matters in Muskegon County

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*Special Focus On*  
***African Americans***

*Western Michigan Minority Health Project  
a W.K. Kellogg Foundation Funded Initiative*



# *Acknowledgements*

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**MINORITY HEALTH MATTERS IN MUSKEGON COUNTY**  
***SPECIAL FOCUS ON AFRICAN AMERICANS***

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# Introduction

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This document was compiled to focus on the health status of Muskegon County's African American population.

According to a study released October 22, 2003 by Standard & Poor's CVC (Corporate Value Consulting), the health gap between whites and minorities in the United States could cost taxpayers, patients, and employers \$331 billion in medical expenditures and productivity over the next seven years. Standard & Poor's analysis compared the broad costs of diabetes, hypertension and HIV/AIDS and created an economic picture of the health gap to provide information to policy makers and reinforce the need to address these disparities.

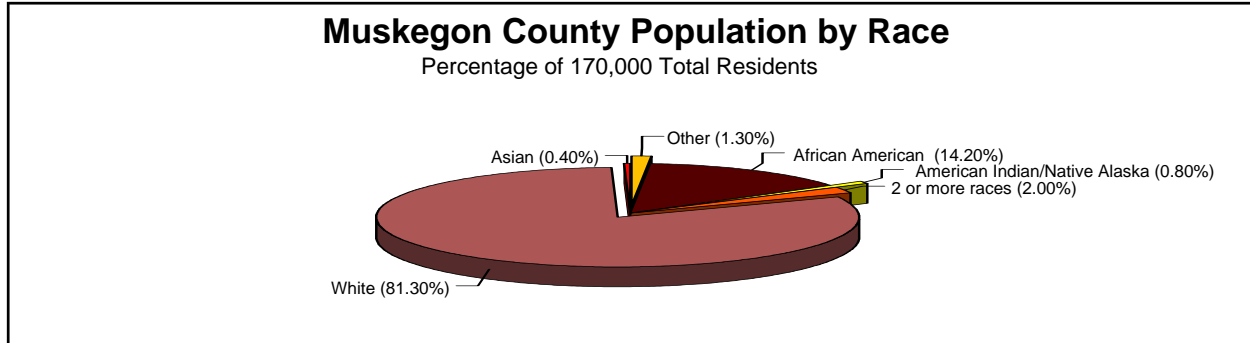
The demographic changes that are anticipated over the next decade magnify the importance of addressing disparities in health status. The groups currently experiencing poorer health status are expected to grow as a proportion of the total population; therefore, the future health of our community as a whole will be influenced substantially by our success in improving the health of these racial and ethnic minorities.

The purpose of this booklet is to create awareness and spark dialogue in our community about eliminating the health-related inequalities that exist between African Americans and white residents of Muskegon County.

Achieving parity in health will require a major county-wide commitment. We must identify and address the common factors that cause higher levels of disease and disability in racial and ethnic minority populations. Some of the underlying causes include poverty, lack of access to quality health services, environmental hazards in homes and neighborhoods, and the need for effective prevention programs tailored to specific community needs.

We hope that this publication will enhance everyone's knowledge about health and motivate community leaders, businesses, churches, schools, agencies and individuals to work towards improving the quality of health for the entire Muskegon County community.

# Demographics



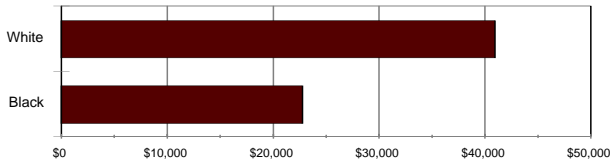
The 2000 Census showed that there were 24,166 African Americans living in the County of Muskegon representing 14.2% of the county’s total population of approximately 170,200.

<b>Muskegon County Population by Race</b>		
SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000		
White	138,291	81.3%
African American	24,166	14.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native	1,402	0.8%
Asian	718	0.4%
Some other race	2,205	1.3%
Two or more races	3,418	2.0%
<b>Total Muskegon County Population</b>	<b>170,200</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>African Americans in Muskegon County</b>			
<b>Table of Age Distribution</b>			
SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000			
Age in Years	Males	Females	F/M Ratio
Under 5	1069	1099	1.03
5 to 14	2512	2463	0.98
15 to 24	1881	1870	0.99
25 to 34	1964	1767	0.90
35 to 44	1836	1714	0.93
45 to 54	1279	1386	1.08
55 to 64	603	782	1.30
65 to 74	462	606	1.31
75 to 84	247	405	1.64
85 and over	71	150	2.11
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11924</b>	<b>12242</b>	<b>1.03</b>

The number of African American males in Muskegon County is approximately equal to or greater than the number of African American females in age categories up to 54 years. Then disparities begin to appear, with females consistently outnumbering males. It is common for females to outlive males in all races. But the female to male ratio (over age 54) is greater for African Americans. This indicates a poor survival curve for black males compared to females and white males.

Median Household Income in 1999

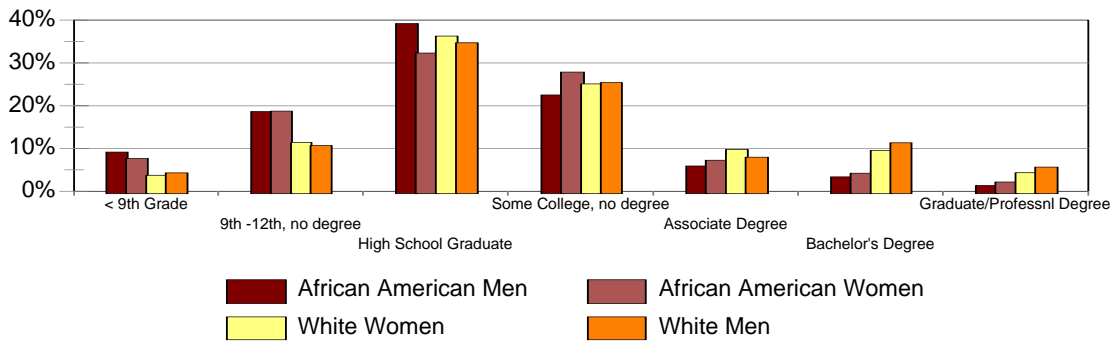


According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the 1999 median household income for African Americans in Muskegon County was \$22,629 and for Caucasians, \$40,771. For every dollar of median income in the white household, African Americans had a median income of fifty-five cents. Census data also showed that 71% of the white male population over the age of 16 were in the labor force compared to 44% of the black male population. The table at the right indicates that the percentage of white households outnumber the percentage of black households at income levels of \$30,000 and higher.

Comparison of Household Income in 1999 by Race for Muskegon County - Black and White Alone		
SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS 2000		
Household Income	Black	White
Less than \$10,000	20.9%	7.4%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	23.7%	13.8%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	15.9%	13.8%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	12.5%	14.1%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	8.4%	12.2%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	6.2%	10.6%
\$60,000 to \$74,999	5.4%	11.7%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	3.1%	9.6%
\$100,000 to \$124,999	2.2%	3.7%
\$125,000 to \$149,999	1.0%	1.2%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	0.4%	1.1%
\$200,000 or more	0.4%	1.1%
<b>Total # of Households</b>	<b>7928</b>	<b>53672</b>

### Comparison of Educational Attainment

by Percentage of Total, Age 25 & Over



Studies have shown that individual and family factors associated with high school graduation, college-going and college continuity are generally the same across racial/ethnic groups. Those most likely to attend college have parents with higher income and education levels and higher educational expectations for their children. Low family income has a proportionally negative effect on college continuity. According to the 2000 Census, the percentage of African Americans (age 25 and over) that complete postsecondary education such as associates, bachelors, graduates and professional degrees are lower than the percentages for whites in Muskegon County.

## Impact of Social Economic Factors

**“Socioeconomic status, social support, and education are fundamental causes of diseases. These fundamental causes of disease are what put people at risk for unhealthy lifestyles. Increasing the social economic status and education of individuals within a community may have a more profound effect on their health than individually-based interventions, giving you more bang for your buck!”**

~ Link and Phelan

*Conditions as Fundamental Causes of Disease*

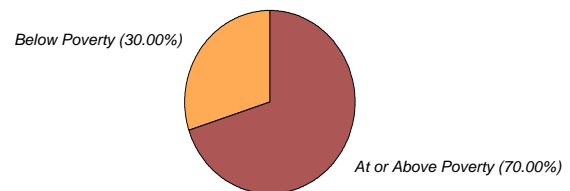
*Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 1995*

**Poverty** is one of many socio-economic factors that predispose Muskegon County’s African Americans to higher rates of illness and death. Figures provided by the U.S. Census Bureau show that 30.6% of African Americans in Muskegon County lived below the federal poverty level in 1999 compared to 8.0% of whites in the county. The proportion of those African Americans in poverty is highest among the very young with 49.4% under 18 years compared to 32.9% of below-poverty-level white residents in Muskegon County.

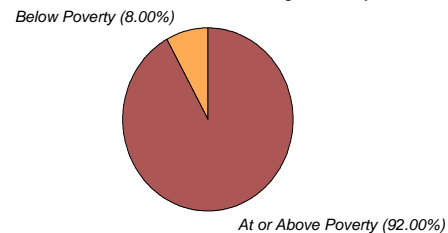
### Percentage of Poverty

Source: 2000 U.S. Census Bureau

Black Residents in Muskegon County



White Residents in Muskegon County



**Unemployment** can lead to a host of serious mental and physical illnesses. Many studies suggest that people who have been unemployed suffer from more heart disease and strokes. The loss of a job is usually accompanied with the loss of primary health insurance. Joblessness can also influence certain conditions (such as anxiety, stress, and depression) which can make a person vulnerable to a wide range of illnesses. The Michigan Department of Career Development reported a 12.0% unemployment rate in Muskegon County for July 2003. Indicative of the disparity in employment, the City of Muskegon Heights, which represents a large percentage of African Americans, experienced a 24.7% unemployment rate for that same period.

**Racial Discrimination** is another socio-economic factor that impacts the health status of African Americans in Muskegon County. In everyday life, the stress that African Americans and other minorities face in general is more constant and more intense than it is for whites. Stan N. Gerber, Ph.D. from Donnelly College in Kansas City, MO noted that while whites have periods of stress, often people of color experience unending stress because of discrimination, poverty, unemployment and other factors. This is an uncomfortable subject for many residents of Muskegon County, but it *can not* be ignored.

**Discrimination in the delivery of health care services** was mentioned repeatedly in recent focus group sessions conducted by the Western Michigan Minority Health Project. Participants from Muskegon County reported that their experiences ranged from rude behavior to incidents of differential treatment. Some respondents gave examples of both racial insensitivity and use of racial slurs by attending health personnel. Many reported that they are hesitant and/or refuse to go back to that provider or any other agency because of the perceived discrimination.

### Relationship of Work and Health Themes from the Research Literature:

- Work is central to social status, one of the most powerful predictors of health outcomes.
- Unemployment is associated with a large number of health risks.
- Inadequate employment is also associated with poor health outcomes.
- The degree of control that employees exercise over their work influences their health.
- At least one study indicates that every step up the occupational ladder has positive health consequences.
- Access to health insurance comes primarily through the workplace and has important health consequences.
- Worksite health promotion programs improve the health of those who have access to them.
- Work influences the health of families and children.
- Health condition affects work status.
- Income inequality affects health.

~ Reflections on the Connections Between Work and Health,  
The California Wellness Foundation, June 2000



**“Minorities are at risk for a number of illnesses and, in many cases, are diagnosed late and/or don’t get adequate medical attention. Now, more than ever, minorities need information so that they can be savvy healthcare consumers.”**

~Dr. Monical Sweeney

Medical Director of Health Watch

# Behavior Risk Factors



The next two pages include statistics and excerpts taken from the 2001 Muskegon County Behavior Risk Factor Survey (BRFS) report dated August 2003 and authored by public health epidemiologist Jean Chang, PhD. All data is reported in percentages with 95% confidence intervals. Information in this report was derived from the results, analysis and data interpretation of 1,244 telephone surveys of residents in Muskegon County age 18 and older with over-sampling of African Americans. This report was not intended to be a comprehensive health review, but instead, a useful tool in identifying health risk behaviors that can be modified to positively impact the health of residents in Muskegon County. The complete report is available on the Muskegon County Health Department's web site located at [www.muskegonhealth.net](http://www.muskegonhealth.net) under the publications section.

<i>Perceived Health Status rated Fair or Poor</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	28.1%	15.4%	n/a

Survey respondents were asked to rate their general health in five categories: excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor. As a result, 28.1% of the African American respondents described their general health as fair or poor, compared to 15.4% of white respondents.

<i>No Health Care Coverage</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	11.8%	8.3%	11.7%

The estimate of no health care coverage was greater for African Americans (11.8%) than whites (8.3%) in Muskegon County. Of the individuals who had health care coverage, most reported that their health care insurance was provided by their employer or someone else's employer.

<i>No Dental Insurance Coverage</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	36.2%	35.2%	n/a

It was estimated that more than one-third of Muskegon County adults did not have any kind of insurance coverage for some or all routine dental care, including dental insurance, prepaid plans such as HMOs, or government plans such as Medicaid.

<i>High Blood Pressure</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	42.7%	33.1%	27.1%

The 2001 BRFS estimated that more than 4 in 10 (42.7%) of African American adult residents in Muskegon County had been told by a health professional that their blood pressure was high. This was higher than the rate for whites in Muskegon County (33.1%) and the state average (27.1%).

<i>High Cholesterol</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	32.5%	33.8%	32.9%

It was estimated that about one-third of Muskegon County residents had ever been told that their cholesterol was high. The local prevalence of high cholesterol was similar to the State average. According to the survey, 65.2% of African Americans in Muskegon County had ever had their cholesterol checked, compared to 74.7% of whites and 76.7% for the state average.

<b><i>Overweight (BMI of 25 or higher)</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>	<b><i>State Average</i></b>
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	<b>75.8%</b>	<b>63.6%</b>	<b>61.0%</b>
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BMI (weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared) was solely based on self-reported height and weight. It was estimated that 75.8% of African Americans in Muskegon County were overweight, compared to 63.6% of Caucasians and higher than the 61.0% state average.

<b><i>Obesity (BMI of 30 or higher)</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>	<b><i>State Average</i></b>
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	<b>38.8%</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>24.7%</b>
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Obesity was more prevalent among African Americans (38.8%) than among Caucasians (25.7%) in Muskegon County. The proportion of obesity was higher among individuals with a lower education, income less than \$20,000, and age group 45 to 74. The state average was 24.7%.

<b><i>Trying to Lose Weight</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>	<b><i>State Average</i></b>
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	<b>41.4%</b>	<b>48.7%</b>	<b>n/a</b>
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Of those who were overweight, more Caucasians (48.7%) than African Americans (41.4%) reported that they were trying to lose weight. The proportion of trying to lose weight increased with an increase of income, education, or individuals in age group 45 to 64.

<b><i>Currently Smoking Cigarettes</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>	<b><i>State Average</i></b>
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	<b>30.7%</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>26.1%</b>
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More African Americans (30.7%) than Caucasians (26.1%) reported that they currently smoke cigarettes, while those that ever smoked by race was African Americans: 47.7% and Caucasians: 55.5%. Prevalent factors included lower education, lower income, or age group 25 to 54.

<b><i>Alcohol Consumption in past month (30 days)</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>	<b><i>State Average</i></b>
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	<b>34.4%</b>	<b>51.8%</b>	<b>n/a</b>
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More Caucasians (51.8%) than African Americans (34.4%) reported that they currently drank alcohol. More Caucasians (17.6%) than African Americans (10.3%) were found to be binge drinkers. The proportion of drinking and driving was slightly greater for blacks (3.3%) than whites (2.6%).

<b><i>Asthma (ever told they had)</i></b>	<b><i>Black</i></b>	<b><i>White</i></b>	<b><i>State Average</i></b>
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	<b>12.2%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>8.8%</b>
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In Michigan, asthma accounts for the fourth most common cause of preventable hospitalizations. Asthma prevalence was 12.2% for African Americans compared with 10.5% for Caucasians and a state average of 8.8%. The proportion of respondents who reported they still had asthma was 8.1% of blacks and 8.0% of whites in Muskegon County.

<i>Arthritis</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	35.1%	28.2%	38.4%

According to the survey, 30% of Muskegon County adults answered “yes” to the question: “Have you ever been told by a doctor that you have arthritis?” which is below the state average (38.4%). More African Americans (35.1%) than Caucasians (28.2%) reported that they had arthritis.

<i>Diabetes</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	10.6%	8.7%	7.2%

Diabetes is one of the leading causes of death in Muskegon County. According to the BRFSS, the proportion of diabetes was greater for African Americans (10.6%) than for Caucasians (8.7%) and significantly higher than the state average (7.2%). Diabetes prevalence increased with age.

<i>Disability (limited activities)</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	30.1%	21.4%	18.2%

According to the survey, 30.1% of African Americans and 21.4% of Caucasians reported that they were limited in any way in any activities. The state average was 18.2%. The need for special equipment because of a health problem was 11.3% for blacks and 6.4% for whites in Muskegon County.

<i>Mammogram &amp; Clinical Breast Exam</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	89.5%	93.3%	n/a

The estimate of women, who were 40 years and older, ever having a mammogram was slightly higher for Caucasians (93.3%) than for African Americans (89.5%). Women age 40 and older who reported ever having a clinical breast exam: 89.6% for Caucasians and 84.9% for African Americans.

<i>Prostate Cancer Screening (ever had Digital Rectal Examination)</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	90.8%	83.8%	87.0%

It was estimated that 90.8% of African American and 83.8% of Caucasian men 50 years and older in Muskegon County had ever had a digital rectal exam (DRE), compared to 87% of the state average. More African Americans (90.1%) than Caucasians (80.0%) reported that they had ever had a prostate-specific-antigen (PSA) test. The state average was 78.1%.

<i>Colorectal Cancer Screening</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>State Average</i>
	54.1%	62.7%	n/a

Early detection can reduce deaths due to colorectal cancer. It was estimated that 54.1% of African American and 62.7% of Caucasian residents age 50 and older had ever used a FOBT kit at home to determine if the stool contained blood. Over half of the respondents had ever had a sigmoidoscopy.

SOURCE: The Muskegon County Health Department, *2001 Muskegon County Behavior Risk Factor Survey (BRFS)*. Core questions of the survey were adapted from the National and State BRFSS questionnaires. The survey covered all townships, villages and cities in Muskegon County. Data collection started in January 2001 and was completed in December 2001. The 2001 Muskegon County BRFSS data were weighted to represent the Muskegon County 2000 Census by adjusting the number of people in sex, age, and race categories.

# Major Factors that Affect our Health

We need to understand the factors that cause preventable disease and death in our community in order to improve our health. A person's *biology* and *behaviors* can impact their health, along with their *social* and *physical environments*. In addition, *policies and interventions* can influence health by targeting factors related to individuals and their environments including *access to quality health care*.

— *Healthy People 2010, Office of Disease Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

**Biology** refers to your genetic makeup, family history, and the physical and mental health problems acquired during life. Aging, diet, physical activity, smoking, stress, alcohol or illicit drug abuse, injury or violence or an infectious or toxic agent may result in illness or disability and can produce a “new” biology.

**Behaviors** are personal choices, responses and reactions to internal and external conditions. Lifestyle behaviors are the leading contributor to illness and premature death in our community. Behaviors can have a reciprocal relationship to biology; in other words, each can react to the other. For example, smoking can alter the cells in the lungs and change your biology (shortness of breath, emphysema, or cancer). Similarly, a family history such as heart disease (biology) may be reduced through good eating habits, avoiding tobacco, and staying active physically.

**Access to quality health care** is important to eliminate health disparities and to increase the quality and years of healthy life for all people living in Muskegon County.

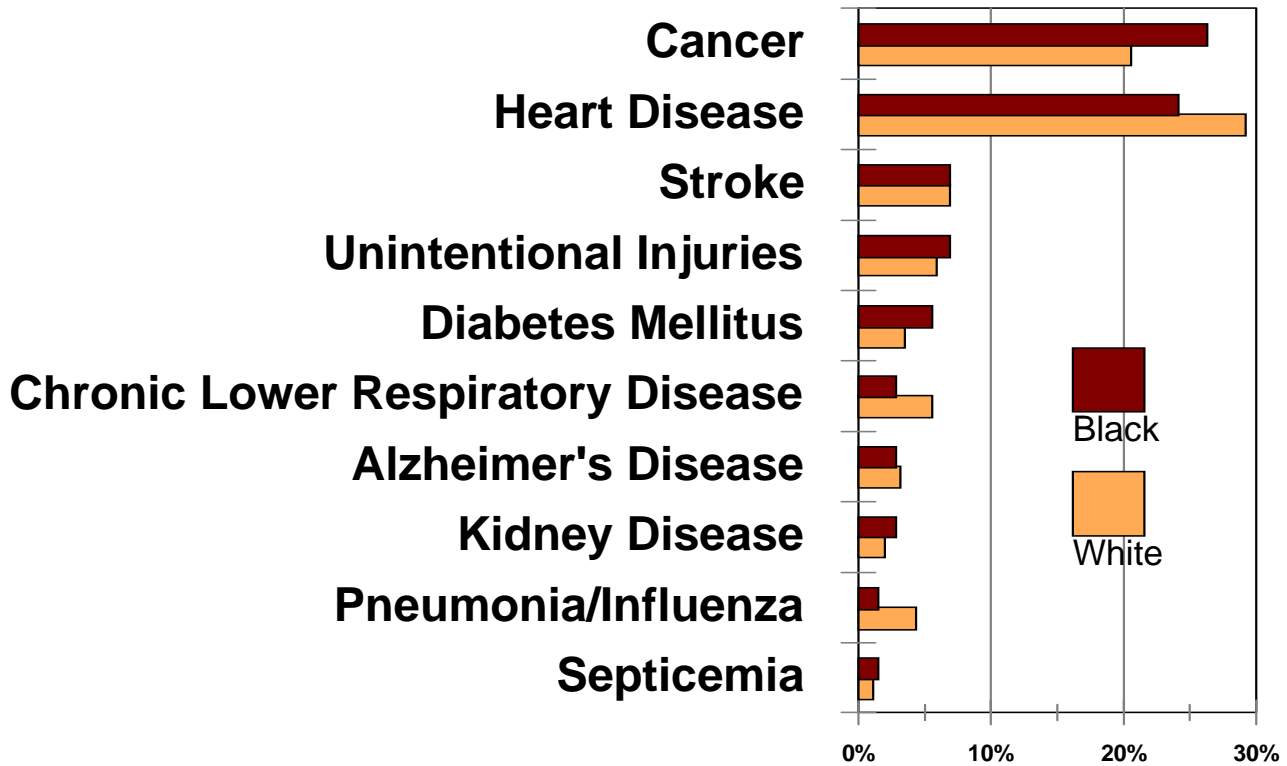
**Social environment** includes interactions with family, friends, co-workers, and others in the community. It also encompasses social institutions, such as law enforcement, the workplace, places of worship, and schools. Housing, public transportation, and the presence or absence of violence in the community are other components of the social environment.

**Physical environment** is that which can be seen, touched, heard, smelled, and tasted. It also contains less tangible elements, such as radiation and ozone. It can be harmful when exposed to toxic substances; irritants; infectious agents; and physical hazards in homes, schools, and work-sites. The physical environment can also promote good health, for example, by providing clean and safe places for people to work, exercise, and play.

**Policies and interventions**, such as health promotion campaigns, mandating seat belt use, and disease prevention services, can have a powerful and positive effect on the health of individuals and the community.

# *Leading Causes of Death for African Americans in Muskegon County*

Source: 2001 Michigan Resident Death File  
 Vital Records & Health Data Development  
 Michigan Department of Community



*Leading Causes of Death in 2001 by Percentage of Total*  
 Total number of Muskegon County deaths in 2001: Blacks = 225, Whites = 1359, Other = 11

## Cancer

Cancer was the leading cause of death in 2001 for African American residents of Muskegon County. Leading sites of new cancer include breast, prostate, lung and bronchus, colon and rectum, and uterine cervix. African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups have lower survival rates than whites for most cancers.<sup>1</sup> *Lung Cancer* is the most common cause of cancer death in the United States. *Breast cancer* is the second leading cause of death due to cancer among African American women. *Cervical cancer* is a disease that strikes African American women three times more than white women. African American men have a higher rate of *prostate cancer* than the general population. Tumors from the disease is more aggressive in African American men than prostate tumors found in non-African American males. Cancer of the *colon* (large intestine) *and rectal cancer* is another leading cause of cancer-related deaths that impacts African Americans at higher rates than other race and ethnic groups.

**RISK FACTORS:** Family history, cigarette smoking, poor diet, and poor health care.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** Detecting cancer early may allow for more treatment options and result in better outcomes. Considerable evidence suggests that routine screenings can reduce the number of deaths. Other things that can help include regular health screenings, quitting smoking, reducing fat intake, and eating more fruits and vegetables.

## Heart Disease & Stroke

The heart disease death rate for African Americans in Muskegon County has remained consistently high. It was the second leading cause of death for this population in 2001. Heart disease begins with narrowing of the arteries that feed the heart – the coronary arteries. The narrowing is caused by cholesterol, by hypertension (high blood pressure), and by smoking, among other things. A stroke is associated with cardiovascular disease, and is a sudden decrease or interruption in blood flow (carrying oxygen) to a part of the brain. Brain cells start to die in a matter of minutes without oxygen. High blood pressure is known as the “silent killer” and remains a major risk factor for chronic heart disease, stroke, and heart failure. Incidents of heart disease and stroke are increasing at an alarming rate in the African American community. Some studies suggest that it may be related to lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise regimen, and stress, as well as larger societal factors such as poverty and discrimination.

**RISK FACTORS:** Family history, hypertension, diabetes, high cholesterol level, obesity, cigarette smoking, poor diet, and lack of physical exercise.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** Increase level of aerobic physical activity, maintain a healthy weight, limit the consumption of alcohol, reduce salt and sodium intake, and eat a reduced fat diet high in fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy food.

## Unintentional Injuries

More than 1 in 20 of the African American deaths in Muskegon County for 2001 was due to unintentional injuries. The primary cause of these injuries are due to motor vehicle crashes, firearms, poisonings, suffocation, falls, fires, and drowning. The risk of injury is so great that most persons sustain a significant injury at some time during their lives.

**RISK FACTORS:** Drinking and driving, not using seat belts, excessive speed, substance abuse, and not childproofing the home.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** Do not drink and drive, always wear seat belts, do not speed, control alcohol intake, and keep household products, matches, medicines out of children's reach, and use child safety gates.

## Diabetes Mellitus

Diabetes poses a significant health challenge for African Americans in Muskegon County. Diabetes Mellitus is a medical condition in which the body is unable to process glucose (sugar), an important source of energy. Insulin transports the glucose from the blood into the cells in the body. People with diabetes are unable to make enough insulin to transport the glucose into their cells, instead, the glucose stays in the blood. African Americans and other racial ethnic groups suffer disproportionately in the occurrence of diabetes, as well as associated complications, compared to white populations. There are two forms of Diabetes Mellitus, Type I and Type II. At least 90% of people who have diabetes have Type II. Diabetes Mellitus can cause several complications, including kidney, nerve and eye disease, and arteriosclerosis. It may also lead to heart attacks and stroke.

**RISK FACTORS:** Obesity, family heredity, poverty resulting in limited access to care, lack of physical exercise.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** Eat foods which are low in fat, carbohydrates (sugar) and salt; avoid the onset of obesity with physical exercise and a healthy diet.

## Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease

Chronic lower respiratory disease (CLRD) is comprised of many conditions such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. In emphysema, the small air sacs in the lung are destroyed. With bronchitis, the lining of the airways that lead to the lungs becomes irritated, inflamed, and swollen. CLRD occurs most often in older people. Men are also more likely to die of CLRD than women. The age-adjusted rate of death from CLRD is generally higher for whites than for African-Americans. *SOURCE: Division for Vital Records and Health Statistics, Michigan Department of Community Health*

**RISK FACTORS:** It is estimated that smoking is responsible for more than 80 percent of all CLRD. Other factors can include continual exposure to dust, fumes or gases.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** Stop smoking and get regular health check-ups.

## Alzheimer's Disease

Alzheimer's disease is a disease which, over time, damages the brain and results in impaired memory, thinking, and behavior. It is the most common cause of dementia, a group of symptoms often described as losing the ability to think, remember, and reason.

**RISK FACTORS:** Identifying risk factors is difficult because the causes are unknown. The disease usually begins after age 65, however, it is not a normal part of aging.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** A prevention for Alzheimer's disease has not been found.

## Kidney Disease

Kidney disease is the inability of the kidney to perform its normal function of getting rid of the body's excess fluid and blood toxins. Kidney disease may also result in the development of kidney stones. Chronic kidney failure is the most significant result of chronic kidney disease. Renal replacement therapy (dialysis or transplantation) is necessary to maintain life when deterioration of the kidney function becomes irreversible. Treated chronic kidney failure, also called end-stage renal disease, is the most feared consequence of kidney disease. African Americans have the highest overall risk of chronic kidney disease. Rates of new cases are increasing by 7 percent per year. Renal transplantation is an important life-saving renal replacement therapy and has been shown to offer many advantages when compared to dialysis.

**RISK FACTORS:** Diabetes, high blood pressure, environmental exposures, family history of kidney disease, obesity, excessive use of anti-inflammatory drugs, excessive use of pain killers and increasing age.

**REDUCE YOUR RISKS:** Avoid foods high in fat content, salt and sugar; drink large amounts of nonalcoholic fluid; and make efforts to avoid or control both hypertension and diabetes.

## Pneumonia and Influenza

Pneumonia and influenza is another leading cause of death for residents in Muskegon County. The risk of complications, hospitalizations, and deaths from influenza and pneumonia are highest for the very young, those age 65 and older, and those with underlying health conditions which compromise their immunity. Among healthy older children and young adults, death is rare. Prevention through a vigorous vaccination program can minimize risks.

## Septicemia

Septicemia is a serious, rapidly progressive, life-threatening infection that can arise from infections throughout the body, including infections in the lungs, abdomen, and urinary tract.

*SOURCE: Unless otherwise noted, the source of descriptive information about the leading causes of death was excerpted from Healthy People 2010, Office of Disease Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The prevalence and impact on African Americans, risk factors and prevention steps were also derived from sources outlined in the publication as well.*

# Community Voices

*"People don't care how much you know, they only know how much you care. God gave us the ability to think out of the box and speak up when necessary. Don't let other people or agencies jeopardize your health!"*



**Bill Gill, County Commissioner**

**"Health is a gift from God. We should treasure it and cherish it!"**

Rillastine Wilkins, Mayor  
City of Muskegon Heights



*"I think prevention is the best approach to health. We all should get regular screenings and follow up on things that need our attention."*

**Barb Stevenson**  
Executive Secretary to the City Manager  
City of Muskegon Heights

*"Health and quality of life go hand in hand. There are so many factors to consider and so many underlying causes that put us at greater risk. However, there are some things (within our power) that we can do to improve our health. We need to get motivated and focus on improving our quality of life! We can't wait for other people to do it for us."*

Kathy Herman, Deputy Health Officer  
Muskegon County Health Department



*"If you want to look good and feel good, make health your #1 priority. As young people, we should cherish our health because we will not always have it."*

Jeffery L. Melton, 17  
Muskegon Heights High School  
and Muskegon Community College



*"Family and relationships play a key role in a person's health. We all need a support system that will help us eat right, exercise and promote good health."*

Sheronda and Officer Joey Williams



**"Hours of operations for health care providers should meet the needs of the working poor. I can't afford to take off from work when sick, therefore, the emergency room is my only option."**

Focus Group Member, WMMHP—  
Muskegon



*"Above all, safeguard your health!"*

Derek Melton, 14  
Muskegon Heights High School

**"Kids eat whatever parents set in front of them. Everyone can't afford what is called healthy food."**

Focus Group Member, WMMHP—Muskegon



*"I think our relationships with doctors has a lot to do with our health! We need to be able to trust those who provide services for us. Fear is a huge factor that prevents those who need healthcare to gain access to it."*

Wilmer Cullen, healthCARE

**"All people, regardless of economic or racial background should be treated with dignity."**

Focus Group Member, WMMHP—Muskegon

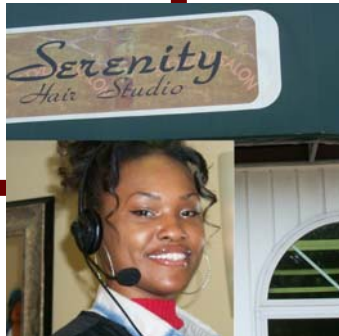
*"When it comes to health — it should be the #1 priority. Everything else should be secondary."*

Melvin Burns, City Manager  
City of Muskegon Heights



*"Healthy hair is not the only thing you should be concerned about...you should be concerned about what is on the inside."*

Hairstylist & Owner, Serenity Hair Studio



**"I feel like the doctors in Muskegon are racist. After all these years, it is very disturbing that people providing care still don't look like us."**

Senior Citizen, Focus Group Member,  
WMMHP—Muskegon

# Community Resources

NOTE: This is an abbreviated list of the many community resources available to residents of Muskegon County. There are numerous agencies and programs available to assist you. This small reference page does not include all of the sources. We urge everyone to ask about services and programs that they need and don't give up until you find the source that fits your current situation.



## **Muskegon County Health Department—209 E. Apple Avenue**

*Visit our website at [www.muskegonhealth.net](http://www.muskegonhealth.net) for a complete list of our many services and programs.*

**Hearing & Vision Screening**                      **724-4531** *(by appointment only, please call in advance)*  
Provides no charge hearing and vision screening for school-age children.

**Immunization**    **724-1220**  
Provides recommended childhood vaccinations as well as HepB, Tetanus, Flu, and Pneumonia shots. Travel immunizations.

**Immunization Registry (MCIR)**                      **724-1220**  
Information on the immunization status of individuals in Muskegon County.

**Lead Abatement**    **724-6208**  
Initiates corrective steps toward removing lead-based paint hazards. Provides information on corrective measures.

**Prescription Discount Program**                      **724-6321**  
Open to any Muskegon County resident, age 18 and over, without prescription coverage. Annual cost is \$15 per person. Participants receive a prescription discount card, a pharmacy directory, and discounts off regular prices on many brand-name as well as generic drugs.

**Sexually Transmitted Infections**                      **724-1258**  
Testing, treatment and education of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS.

**Substance Abuse Prevention**                      **724-6350**  
Educational programs designed to discourage the use of alcohol, drugs & tobacco.

**Women's Cancer Screening (BCCCP)**                      **724-1286**  
Provides free clinical pelvic and breast exams, Pap smears, mammograms, and education for eligible women age 50 to 64.

**Women Infants and Children (WIC)**                      **724-1281**  
Coupons for supplemental foods, nutrition information and referrals to other agencies are available to pregnant women, breast feeding mothers, infants, and children under age five (5) who are at risk medically or nutritionally, have a low to middle income, and live in Muskegon County.

**Food Service Sanitation****724-1250**

Minimize the risk of food borne illness to persons consuming food from licensed food service establishments; assure reasonable customer expectations relative to sanitation of food service establishments. Report suspected food poisoning & related concerns.

**Dental Health Promotion****724-1283**

Provides dental health education to groups and organizations about the importance of brushing teeth; the impact of nutrition on tooth development; and the prevention of childhood dental disease and tooth decay.

**Children's Special Health Care Services** **724-6209**

Provide advocacy, information and referral services to families that have children with special health care needs.

**Vector (Animal) Control****724-6007**

Protect the community from disease, injury and nuisance caused by dogs and other animals as authorized by law. Investigate animal bites, nuisances, and cruelty complaints. Sell annual dog licenses. Impound stray dogs.

**Environmental Quality (Health Protection)** **724-1250**

Survey non-community water supply. Investigate all known or suspected cases of drinking water contamination. Issue health advisories when necessary. Monitor beach water. Inspect campgrounds, mobile home parks, and public swimming pools. Regulate on-site sewage treatment systems. Provide burning permits, raw land evaluations, and nuisance/imminent health hazard control.

**Public Health Education (Health Promotion)** **724-6350**

Promote positive lifestyles and provide training, resource materials, and educational sessions for individual, group, and community-wide health promotion strategies that address health risks associated with infectious disease, chronic disease and injuries, maternal and child health, and environmental health.

**General Public Health Nursing****724-1286**

Health promotion, screenings, and educational activities that cover a variety of general public health concerns not covered in other programs such as head lice, sudden infant death syndrome and grief counseling, and issues identified through an assessment process.

**Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention** **724-1209**

Outreach and referrals to appropriate providers for testing and management of lead poisoning. Case management services for children identified with elevated blood lead levels. Group presentations and individual counseling available.

**Family Planning** **1836 E. Oak Avenue** **777-6364**

Affordable, quality family planning services focused on improving reproductive health. Provides physical exams, birth control methods, pregnancy tests, counseling, and education in family planning.

## *Community Resources (continued)*

### *Community Mental Health Services of Muskegon County*

Provides a large number of services, including psychiatric care, individual and group therapy, counseling, and mental health education. Provides information about mental illnesses including treatment, services and/or initial screening.

**CMH Access** 720-3200 (TTY 720-3280)

**Emergency Crisis Line** 722-HELP or 722-4357

### *Every Woman's Place (Almond Center for Women & Children)*

**1221 West Laketon Avenue** 759-7909

#### **Crisis Center**

24-hour crisis intervention, shelter, and counseling services are available for domestic violence and sexual assault victims (adult and child). Support services include advocacy, information, referrals, support groups, substance abuse education and counseling, community education, parenting classes, and housing assistance. Shelter is available for women 18 years of age and older and their dependent children. All services are free and confidential.

#### **Webster House**

24-hour crisis intervention, shelter, and counseling services are available for homeless and runaway teens ages 12-17. Support services include advocacy, information, referrals, support groups, substance abuse education and counseling, family counseling, community education, and the transition to independent living programs. All services are free and confidential.

**24-Hour Crisis Hotline** 722-3333

### *Family Services Workforce Development Center*

**1516 Peck Street, Muskegon** 726-2626

Provides programs and services that help individuals and families develop methods and plans to become self-sufficient through creative alternatives to existing public support systems. Programs include employment job training and skill development, veteran's assistance, older worker services, "Dad's Only" program, managing diabetes and many more. There are no charges for services but some programs require that participants meet certain eligibility requirements.

***Hackley Community Care Center    2700 Baker Street    737-1335***

Provides acute and chronic care to underserved, uninsured, and Medicaid clients (also accepts other health plans). Services include preventative health care; acute & chronic health care; nurse case management; cancer prevention; minor office surgeries; family planning; EPSDT well child exams; laboratory services; hearing & vision testing; OB services; behavioral health; maternal & infant support services; and dental clinic (general dentistry) services.

***HealthCARE    134 E. Barney Avenue    733-2128***

Offers 30-hour training course for lay people in area churches to be health resources in community. Health info messages posted on bulletin boards, coordinates off-site blood pressure, cholesterol and body analyzer screenings throughout community. Also offers youth education services, programs and presentations at various community locations.

***Muskegon Community Health Project    565 W. Western Ave.    728-3201***

A citizen-led effort to improve the health status and quality of life for all families of Muskegon County. Programs improve access to health services and education. Provides diabetes screening for at-risk individuals. Inform individuals of their health status and educate them on how to prevent or manage this disease. Coordinates mobile van and dental clinics providing children with dental screenings, restorative services, and referrals.

***Muskegon Family Care    2845 S. Getty    733-4800*  
*1700 Oak Street    777-2093***

Provides family practice medical care at two clinic sites. Offers prenatal care, dental services, behavioral healthcare/counseling services and Maternal and Infant Support Services home visiting program. Other programs/services include discount drug program, primary care services with health maintenance exams for patients of all ages.

***Senior Resources/An Area Agency on Aging    255 W. Sherman Blvd.    739-5858***

Provides a range of local services to all older Americans aged 60 years and over. Advocates on behalf of all older persons within our service area. Informs and educates seniors, families and the public on available services and issues affecting older adults. Services include, but not limited to: home delivered meals, congregate meals, homemaking, personal care, transportation, legal assistance, senior center staffing, chore service, health screening, hearing screening and counseling.

***West Michigan Therapy    130 E. Apple Avenue    728-2138***

Provides outpatient substance abuse treatment, inpatient substance abuse treatment, long-term homeless shelter for substance abusing women with family issues, emergency shelter, life skills, parenting, case management, youth development and SARF assessments.

## Where do we go from here?

The health concerns of African Americans in Muskegon County have their roots in social, economic and political realities. The effect of these disparities can reach beyond the individuals and impact the community-at-large. Some studies suggest that the gap in health disparities is an indicator of the community's overall health; the smaller the gap, the healthier the community.

*"Over the years, it has become clear that individual health is closely linked to community health – the health of the community and environment in which individuals live, work, and play. Likewise, community health is profoundly affected by the collective behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of everyone who lives in the community."<sup>1</sup>*

Addressing the challenge of health improvement in Muskegon County is a shared responsibility that require the active participation of leadership throughout the community and participation from the residents themselves.

As individuals, we must recognize the need to be more active in decisions that affect our own health. As community leaders, we must assume a leadership role in promoting healthier behaviors or use our influence and social stature to advocate for and implement policies and programs that can dramatically improve the health of dozens, hundreds, and even thousands of residents in Muskegon County.

An important factor in bringing about a positive change is through lifestyle behaviors. Individuals can make a big difference in the quality of their life by taking charge of their own body and making healthy choices.

Partnerships are effective tools for improving health in communities.

*"Community partnerships, particularly when they reach out to nontraditional partners, can be among the most effective tools for improving health in communities."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Source: *The Relationship Between Individual and Community Health*  
*Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*  
*Office of Disease Prevention, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services*

It is important to acknowledge the existence of health disparities in order to successfully impact and improve the health and quality of life of residents in Muskegon County. Individuals, organizations, and private industry all play an integral role in a healthy community and need to be included in the process. The multifaceted approach recommended to continue the momentum is as follows:

- ◆ *Disseminate the findings* of this report widely to the general public, advocacy groups, community-based organizations, civil-rights agencies, health care providers, businesses and government.
- ◆ *Establish a major community task force* on the issue of health disparities and health improvement focusing on educating and motivating African Americans to take steps to improve their health. This task force will also monitor and encourage health care providers to enhance their recruitment activities, promotions and services to reflect cultural sensitivity towards those they serve. In addition, this task force will examine and report specific topics deemed essential in our community health vision. Every two months, this group will focus on an emerging health-related topic that affects the residents of this community. Some suggestions for future topics include **HIV/AIDS, hypertension, the family structure and men's health, obesity, type II diabetes in children, and racism—its impact on stress.**
- ◆ *Collaborate* and work with other health institutions, community-based organizations, schools, businesses and other community stakeholders to adopt the federal recommendation of creating a community initiative to make significant improvements in this community's health. The World Health Organization defines a healthy community as *"one that is safe with affordable housing and accessible transportation systems, work for all who want to work, a healthy and safe environment with a sustainable ecosystem, and offers access to health care services which focus on prevention and staying healthy."* Components of this initiative will include assessing the community's needs, developing a shared vision, setting targets, and monitoring health improvements.



Muskegon High School—Muskegon Michigan



Muskegon Heights High School—Muskegon Heights, Michigan

*For more information about Western Michigan Minority Health Project (Muskegon) contact:*

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**Kathy Herman, Deputy Director**

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Muskegon, MI 49442  
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Email: hermanka@co.muskegon.mi.us



## *12 Things YOU Can Do To Improve Your Health!*

1. Exercise regularly!  
(3 or more days per week, for at least 30 minutes per day)
2. Attain and maintain a healthy weight.
3. Eat at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruits each day.
4. Don't use tobacco.
5. Limit alcohol use and eliminate illicit drug use.
6. Practice responsible, safe sex to avoid unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV/AIDS.
7. Assure that your children are up to date with all vaccinations.  
(Follow state recommended immunization and influenza schedules.)
8. Wear seatbelts and properly secure children in child seats.
9. Get regular screenings for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, etc.
10. Reduce conditions or activities that causes mental stress.
11. Practice good dental hygiene and have your teeth cleaned and checked regularly.
12. Visit a doctor or medical professional when you sense something is wrong with your body or mind.