

Wake Up Call

I was home for two days with a fever and other symptoms that made me want to stay in bed. Feeling “under the weather” is not fun and it prevented me from doing several things I wanted to do. I had time to think about others who have chronic health conditions.

Kansas Department of Health and Environment’s (KDHE) Secretary Lee Norman delivered the first ever *State of the State of Health of Kansans* address to the Kansas Senate and House of Representatives last week. This was an unprecedented speech and was a wake up call highlighting the major health crises Kansans are facing and the significant declines in health our state has seen over the past 30 years.

“Of all the states in the US, over the past 30 years, Kansas has seen the greatest decline in its health rankings.” This is a powerful call to action, and Secretary Norman also said “...we have unhealthy behaviors that need to be remedied and that there’s a need for active illness prevention and intervention.”

If you don’t have an “illness” you might be quick to ignore this call to action. However, if you expand this concept from “illness” prevention and intervention to that of overall health and wellness, it applies to all of us.

Some of the statistics and rankings Secretary Norman highlighted included:

- Behaviors - Kansas ranks #38 in the survey for obesity rates and #30 for smoking.
- Environment - Kansas ranks #21 in the U.S. for the number of children living in poverty. Kansas’ chlamydia numbers are twice the healthiest state, at 465 per 100,000.
- Policy - Kansas ranks #49 in U.S. for females receiving the HPV vaccine and #34 for males. Kansas ranks #32 for children 19-35 months receiving completed vaccines at 69 percent. Kansas ranks 40th for the amount of dollars in public health funding at \$60/person. This is 4.5 times less than the top state at \$281/per person.
- Medical Care - There is low access to dentists, particularly in rural Kansas. Kansas ranks #38 with 50 dentists per 100,000. Kansas also ranks #35 for mental health providers.
- Outcomes - Kansas ranks in the bottom half on cancer, cardiovascular and diabetes deaths; frequent mental distress; infant mortality; and premature deaths in years lost before age 75.

Dr. Norman continued, “Every Kansan can take steps to improve our state’s health – increase your physical activity, be mindful of proper nutrition and make sure your family is up-to-date on immunizations. It’s also critical that we as a state look beyond ourselves and our families, to our neighbors and community members. It’s time for us to intervene and invest in the health of Kansans.”

K-State Research and Extension Cowley County is actively partnering with our community to offer education and efforts to promote policy, system and environmental changes for health. This work is happening with RISE Cowley (our community health coalition) and upcoming class offerings like Mental Health First Aid and Dining with Diabetes. We are also a partner with other health and human service providers to help connect people with resources. Contact our office for more information or to register for an upcoming class, 221-5450 or 441-4565.

Source: Kansas State Department of Health and Environment; <http://www.kdheks.gov/media>

K-State Research and Extension

February 21 - Mental Health First Aid, South Central Kansas Medical Center, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. \$35, call 620.221.5450 to register.

March 19 - Grant Writing Workshop, City of Arkansas City Water Treatment Facility, 400 W Madison, Arkansas City, \$30

March 24 - Dining with Diabetes, Winfield Public Library, 605 College Street, Winfield, \$25

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