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10/25/07 - Posted from the Daily Record newsroom

## Morris health report: Improve coordination

### Group recommends new county agency to address issues, pooling resources

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DAILY RECORD**

A report issued Wednesday outlined steps that would help Morris County's residents -- and the health care delivery system -- get healthier.

The report, created by the Morris Regional Public Health Partnership, describes shortfalls in the delivery of health care -- such as the need for more outreach to the county's lower-income and immigrant communities -- and highlights education programs that would help the county's wealthier residents deal with high rates of cancer, heart conditions and obesity here.

Overall the report calls for better coordination among agencies, more education programs that emphasize good health and disease prevention, and improved access to health care for low-income residents.

The Morris County Health Improvement Plan was presented to the Morris County freeholders Wednesday in search of their endorsement. It is the report promised by the health partnership last year when it published its criteria for examining, in detail, the health of the county's residents and the delivery of health care.

The report's authors -- drawn from the county's hospitals, its public health and other agencies, and the substance abuse prevention community -- said that while Morris County has a sophisticated health care system in place, and significant resources to address problems, "the changing nature of the health care process, and the fluid demography of the county make this plan a particularly necessary and relevant reference."

Peter Correale, the health officer in Butler, Kinnelon, Pequannock and Riverdale, and president of the health partnership, said there needs to be a way to break down the walls among the health departments and agencies that service the county, to offer better systemic coordination.

It is not a matter of sharing public health officers, since there are 14 health departments in Morris County, providing service to 39 municipalities, but a matter of deciding what aspects of public health care should be handled at the municipal level and which should be addressed on a more regional or county basis, the report's authors said.

Diane Trocchio, health officer in Rockaway Township, which has contracts for service with Boonton Township and Chester Township, said the relationships among towns and the county are "an evolving thing."

The importance of the report, said Robert Schermer, executive director of the partnership, is that it identifies goals to address the key health issues in the county -- including the need for even the county's higher-income residents to seek

#### Health improvement plan recommendations

- Aging: Combine authorities whose capabilities in the areas of public housing, assisted living, senior issues and other subjects are needed to improve the availability and conditions of senior housing. Establish a working group to study and improve the delivery of senior health care.
- Cancer: Increase awareness through specific outreach and educational programs; identify grant opportunities to support the marketing efforts of county agencies in the field.
- Diabetes: Increase the percentage, among people 18 or older with diagnosed diabetes, who have had dilated eye exams in the past year; reduce the number of lower-extremity amputations per 1,000 people with diagnosed diabetes.
- Communicable diseases: Increase hepatitis B vaccination levels among state public employees who could be exposed to blood-borne infections through their jobs; reduce the incidence of Lyme disease.

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out education programs that can help them maintain their health, and the need for access to health care for the county's lower-income and immigrant populations.

He also said there is a need for support services, such as transportation.

He suggested the freeholders could create a county health department to oversee the effort.

The partnership's planning committee examined the factors for the following health issues: aging, cancer, environment, health system payors, heart disease and stroke, obesity, sexually transmitted diseases, asthma, communicable diseases, diabetes, health system structure, mental illness and substance abuse.

The authors supported their data with a public survey mailed to 12,000 county residents, including 1,000 to Spanish-speaking residents.

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