An Ounce of Prevention

Prevention is hard to see, but it can be measured in dollars – and in lives saved. The American Public Health Association estimates that investing $10 per person each year in community-based public health activities could save more than $16 billion within five years across the U.S. – that’s a return of more than $5 for every $1 spent.

Nearly 1 million Americans die every year from preventable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and lung cancer. Treating chronic illnesses accounts for 75% of U.S. health care spending, or $1.5 trillion per year—a very expensive pound of cure.

More than 90% of our national health care dollars go toward medical care – yet most of what keeps us healthy happens outside a doctor’s office. Health happens in our homes, schools and jobs. Public health supports clean water, safe food and healthy neighborhoods – things that affect us every day.

The need for public health-based preventions has never been greater. Snohomish County’s population is expanding, aging, and increasingly diverse. We face complex challenges such as obesity and new forms of contagious disease such as pandemic flu.

Yet since 2008, Snohomish Health District has lost more than one in four employees to budget cuts. Facing continued revenue uncertainty, the Board of Health adopted a 2013 budget that relies on almost $1 million from our reserves, avoiding further layoffs, but a practice we cannot sustain.

Despite the constraints on resources, the Snohomish Health District accomplished much in 2012. Our “ounce of prevention” has saved many pounds of cure, as you’ll see in this annual report. Key work in each of our three divisions is highlighted, along with some summary statistics and accomplishments.

I am proud of our programs and hard-working staff. I am also grateful for our community partners who helped us meet the challenges of 2012, and who will continue to be an essential part of creating a healthier Snohomish County.

Gary Goldbaum, MD, MPH
Health Officer & Director
Communicable Disease works to prevent and control contagious disease in Snohomish County and the north Puget Sound region

Whooping Cough
Snohomish County was ground zero for the state’s whooping cough epidemic. The first death was a Lake Stevens newborn, and for months we had the highest case count in Washington.

With Medical Reserve Corps volunteers and community partners, we hosted 20 free clinics and worked with 21 local pharmacies to vaccinate adults without insurance. Sponsors helped fund a postcard alert sent to all 285,000 Snohomish County households. Thanks to these and other efforts, at least 9,000 more people were vaccinated against whooping cough in 2012 compared to 2011. Contagious diseases such as whooping cough come in cycles – this epidemic is over, but public health must always be ready to respond to the next threat.

Food-borne Illness
One way we prevent illness is by tracking down the source to keep more people from getting sick.

In the spring, dozens of cheerleaders reported illness after a statewide event in Everett. We investigated all food and water sources, interviewed ill people, and coordinated with public health agencies across the state. The cause turned out to be norovirus spread by a sick cheerleader, not by food or water.

In 2012, we responded to 163 food-borne illness complaints involving 259 ill persons.

Tuberculosis
Each year we identify about 25 active tuberculosis cases in Snohomish County. A large cluster of tuberculosis cases among people with mental health problems challenged our disease management function in 2012. Two deaths and a third person in the hospital were connected by the same strain of TB. To prevent further spread, we screened more than 130 close contacts of those people, and found eight others with previously undiagnosed cases of active tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis can be cured if identified early and treated properly, preventing the spread of the disease. Snohomish Health District sent a letter to all hospital emergency departments and medical specialists in the county reminding them to look out for symptoms of TB in at-risk patients.

Prevention Benefits
► Childcare Health: 1,148 childcare providers received free training on sanitation, safe food and when sick kids should stay home.
► Disease Investigations: 1,845 investigations of contagious illness.
► HIV/AIDS: Hosted the first annual Women of Color Health & Beauty Fair in partnership with other organizations.
► Vaccines for Children: Created a set of reference cards for pediatricians to use when talking to parents called “The Greater Risk? Disease vs. Vaccine.” The cards have been recognized as a “promising practice” by the National Association of County & City Health Officials.
Hookah Tobacco Smoking
Smoking is the leading preventable cause of early death and disability in the county. Smoking tobacco in a hookah pipe is just as dangerous as in cigarettes. When the county’s first hookah lounge opened, we took action. A Superior Court found the business “intentionally and repeatedly” ignored the law that protects employees and the public from secondhand smoke and ordered the business to stop. We are a leader among other health agencies in the state for enforcing the voter-approved Smoking in Public Places law.

Health on College Campuses
We presented a Healthy Workplace Award to Everett Community College for prohibiting from its work sites and campus grounds use of any tobacco-containing products. At Edmonds Community College, we helped celebrate the opening of a special room for breastfeeding student moms. Helping mothers to breastfeed – and continue for at least six months – is the highest priority of our Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program because of the lifelong health benefits.

Fluoridation
Improving dental health is the reason the city of Everett began water fluoridation in 1992. Everett’s system is the source of about 75% of Snohomish County’s drinking water. Although other fluoride-containing products like toothpaste are available, water fluoridation remains the most cost-effective method of delivering fluoride to all members of a community. Community water fluoridation costs about $1 per person per year, and is estimated to save $38 in dental costs for every dollar invested. The Board of Health passed a resolution reaffirming its commitment to this community benefit in 2012.

Community Health Assessment
In 2012, the Public Health Advisory Council served as the steering committee for Snohomish County’s Community Health Assessment. Guided by Snohomish Health District staff, the Council reviewed 80 different measures of local health and risk factors, identified trends in the data, and compared Snohomish County with state and national benchmarks. Based on the assessment, we will publish “The Health of Snohomish County Community Report Card” and will seek community partners to develop Community Health Improvement Plans.

Prevention Benefits
► Women & Children: 13,702 clients received nutrition, health and parenting support, and other critical prevention services through WIC and other programs.
► Public Health Nursing: 400 special needs children and their families received direct support and service to assist with serious physical, behavioral, or emotional conditions.
► Healthy Communities: Began work with the cities of Darrington and Granite Falls to increase physical activity, promote healthy eating, and support tobacco-free living for rural residents.
► Dental Health: 1,194 individual children and their caregivers received preventive services to reduce cavities and promote lifelong health.
Preventing Overdose Deaths
Unintentional overdoses are a leading cause of death in Snohomish County. We partner with law enforcement to maintain 29 drop-boxes for unused medication year-round. We collected a record 5,273 pounds of medicine in 2012. The program gets potentially dangerous medicine out of homes and keeps it from polluting our waters.

Septic Systems
With nearly 80,000 septic and onsite sewage systems in Snohomish County, Snohomish Health District’s role permitting and regulating them to protect water quality and human health is essential. We also serve as a technical resource for property owners, and maintain records for existing systems.

In 2012 we received a Department of Health grant for Marine Recovery Area Prevention which included a survey of the McKee’s Beach community, located on Port Susan south of Stanwood. Fewer than 50% of the houses had a known septic or treatment system when we started. By collaborating with property owners, we raised the “known” system status to 98% and confirmed recent maintenance for approximately 50% of the systems. This is critical information for maintaining commercial shellfish harvesting in the area.

Additionally, Snohomish Health District worked with our Septic Issues Committee – made up of local industry representatives – to establish system maintenance provider rules. Certified providers now file their maintenance reports electronically, adding to the existing database of as-built records on our website.

Helping Small Business
Since 2008, we’ve received Department of Ecology grants to work with businesses on proper storage and disposal of hazardous wastes at more than 1,000 dry cleaners, automotive shops and manufacturers. We’ve also partnered with schools and the cities of Lynnwood, Mountlake Terrace, Edmonds, Mukilteo, Bothell, Everett, Snohomish and Marysville. The “local source control” program benefits both small business and the environment.

Prevention Benefits
► Food Safety: 3,250 permanent establishments and 1,182 temporary businesses received permits and more than 6,100 inspections conducted; 25,725 food workers trained.
► Garbage: 1,300 solid waste complaints investigated for illegal dumping and improper handling or storage.
► Pool Inspections: 487 public pools and hot tubs permitted and inspected for facility safety and water quality.
► Home Hazards & Pests: 1,000 phone consultations on rats, bedbugs, mold, mosquitoes and other household troubles.
2012 Budget Information
Where our money comes from and what it supports helps tell the story of public health prevention efforts in Snohomish County.

License & Permit Fees
We collect license and permit fees from food vendors, public and semi-public swimming pools, on-site septic systems, small public water systems and solid waste disposal facilities. Fees cover the costs of administration and inspection.

County Funding
In addition to general funds, Snohomish County supported the agency’s First Steps program for at-risk mothers and their babies through an additional $900,000 contribution from the 1/10th of 1% local sales tax revenue dedicated to mental health and chemical dependency services.

Federal & State Funding
Federal grants support immunizations, sexually transmitted disease control, maternal/infant services, pregnant and parenting teens, drinking water, emergency readiness and response and more.

State grants support immunizations, HIV, tobacco, drinking water, business waste education, onsite sewage, infant early intervention, dental care and more. State funding has not increased since 2000.

Community Support
In 2012, Snohomish Health District received grants or substantial in-kind support from the following local partners in health:

► Verdant Health Commission
► Providence Regional Medical Center
► South Everett-Mukilteo Rotary
► Little Red School House

► Swedish Hospital
► Group Health Cooperative
► Snohomish County Medical Society

Funding Shrinks, Population Grows
While Snohomish County’s population has grown by 14% since 2003, Snohomish Health District budgets have been cut by 11% due to reduced funding. Health District staffing has dropped by almost 30% since our high in 2008. Despite these reductions, we continue to deliver important public health prevention programs, employing new strategies and technologies for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

“In 2010, Snohomish Health District spent half as much per person as the state average - about $28 a year.”
Community Partnerships
Business people, health, school and nonprofit leaders and community members provide valued input to Snohomish Health District staff through the following groups:

► Child Death Review
► Food Advisory Committee
► Public Health Advisory Council
► Septic Issues Committee

A key function of public health is as a convener of community groups. We provide leadership, scientific data and expertise and best practices to support community efforts. Snohomish Health District staff play important roles as facilitators, advisors, or members of many Snohomish County groups and coalitions. The following is just a sampling:

► AIDS Project Snohomish County
► Children’s Commission
► Community Juvenile Justice Coalition
► Dental Access Committee
► Domestic Violence Coalition
► Early Learning Coalition
► Everett Community College Nursing and Medical Assistant Advisory Board
► Everett Water Utilities Committee
► Food Access Committee
► Granite Falls Community Coalition
► Healthy Communities Coalition
► Marysville Together Community Coalition
► Maternal Child Health Care Coalition
► Partnership for Secure Medicine Disposal
► Pregnant & Parenting Teens Stakeholders Group
► Prevention Partners
► Project Homeless Connect
► Region 1 Health Care Coalition
► Snohomish County Health Leadership Coalition
► Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force
► Stillaguamish Clean Water District

Health Care Partners
Snohomish Health District considers all medical providers and pharmacies in Snohomish County as partners, reporting communicable diseases to us, responding to our alerts about current issues and concerns, and supporting special projects to prevent illness and assure access to care.

We also value our ongoing partnerships with the following organizations:

► The Everett Clinic
► Community Health Center of Snohomish County
► Premera Blue Cross
► Providence Regional Medical Center
► SeaMar Community Health Center
► Swedish Medical Center
► Verdant Health Commission
The Snohomish Health District was created in 1959 as an independent special purpose district responsible for public health in Snohomish County. We are separate from county government, although it provides financial support and is an essential partner in many functions.

2013 Board of Health

Karen Guzak, Snohomish Mayor, Chair
Stephanie Wright, Snohomish County Council
Dave Gossett, Snohomish County Council
John Koster, Snohomish County Council
Dave Somers, Snohomish County Council
Brian Sullivan, Snohomish County Council
Shannon Affholter, Everett City Council
Adrienne Fraley-Monillas, Edmonds City Council

Linda Grafer, Mukilteo City Council
John Joplin, Brier City Council
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Kerri Lonergan-Dreke, Lynnwood City Council
Seaun Richards, Mountlake Terrace City Council
Dianne White, Stanwood Mayor
Donna Wright, Marysville City Council