

HEALTHY, WEALTHY & WISE

Identifying Community Health Priorities in Essex, Hamilton, Northern Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties

**A Regional Community Health Assessment to Identify
and Prioritize Health Issues in the Five County Area
Served by the Adirondack Rural Health Network**

Executive Summary

September, 2004

Prepared by the Adirondack Rural Health Network

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1. Executive Summary

This Community Health Assessment is presented to the residents and organizations of Essex, Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren, and Washington counties as a working document for use in developing partnerships and strategies to address priority community health issues. The goal of the Community Health Assessment for the Adirondack Rural Health Network was to identify what matters to local residents about their health and to highlight their concerns about health issues and services in their own communities. A related goal was to create an online directory of health services for the five-county area.

Assessment is the process of regularly and systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making available information on the health needs of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, epidemiologic and other studies of health problems. Assessment is one of the three core functions of public health agencies and is the process of identifying what needs to be done for improving the health of its people (<http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/chac/assess.htm>). With funding provided by the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Adirondack Rural Health Network (ARHN) contracted with the research firm of Holmes & Associates to prepare a Community Health Assessment (CHA) that identifies community health priorities throughout the five-county area.

The five main goals for this assessment are summarized as follows:

- ✓ A community health survey conducted by telephone on a random sample of the area residents, with a target of 300 interviews per county.
- ✓ Community forums within Essex, Hamilton, Warren, and Washington counties with the purpose to provide in-depth community perception on health-related issues and concerns.
- ✓ Data analysis by county, including regional, state, and national data focusing on morbidity and mortality, risk behavior, and health service utilization.
- ✓ A five-county health resource directory in a web-based format for posting on the Internet, including directory design and data compilation.
- ✓ An executive summary and final report to include individual county, state, and regional data along with a summary, interpretation, and discussion.

In addition to analyzing health information from an extensive telephone survey of 1,435 residents in the five-county area and evaluating available health data for 174 health indicators for the region, the consultants organized a series of twelve Community Health Roundtables to find out what matters most to area residents about their health, access to health care, and other community health issues.

The Adirondack Rural Health Network (ARHN) is a community partnership of 16 public, private, and non-profit organizations. Its membership includes a critical access hospital and its affiliated nursing care and assisted living facilities, a network of community health centers, five-county public health agencies, the regional emergency medical services council, mental health agencies, and other health and social services organizations. The ARHN was established in 1992 through a grant award between the Upper Hudson Primary Care Consortium (UHPCC) and the New York State Department of Health.

After considering the data and information compiled for this assessment, the ARHN recognizes two top priority health issues deserving the attention and focus of the region's health agencies and organizations:

1. Access to Quality Health Services

2. Health Promotion for Disease Prevention

The importance of Access to Quality Health Services and Health Promotion for Disease Prevention to improved health in the region is consistently confirmed by health data, public opinion, and the views of health professionals.

The data and public opinion compiled for this assessment indicate there are five major areas of focus within the issue of Access to Quality Health Services, including improved Access to:

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Health Insurance

Long Term Care Options

Mental Health Services

Oral Health and Dental Care

There are four major areas of focus for achieving the greatest impact on Health Promotion for Disease Prevention, including:

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Early Detection of Cancer and Other Disease

Nutrition and Fitness

Tobacco Use

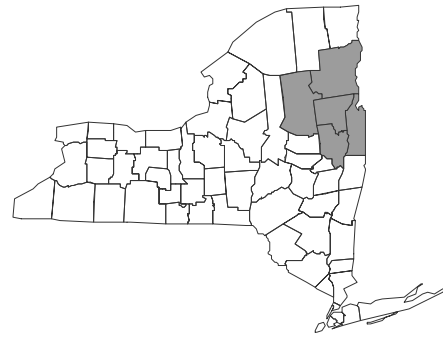
Together, those nine focus areas are the health concerns within *Access to Quality Health Services* and *Health Promotion for Disease Prevention* that are too large for any one organization to tackle alone and that require concerted effort by a broad base of organizations, agencies, governments, schools, and others.

Further information on the priority health issues and focus areas are available online at: <http://arhn.adk.biz>. The full-report is available there for download as are the data used for formulating the priority health issues, including the telephone survey findings on 115 questions asked of 1,435 households and the health indicator data including 174 measures of health status in the five county area. Also available for use by the public

and health care providers is the Online Resource Directory of Health Services for the Counties of Essex, Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren, and Washington. The online directory includes listings for over 900 organizations.

Over the past twelve years, the ARHN has provided a forum to address rural health care delivery problems, instituted a process to develop corrective strategies, and developed a means to implement, monitor, and evaluate new initiatives. The ARHN members recognize that only by proactively identifying and pursuing collaborative action can genuine progress be made to address the priority health needs in the area. By working together, the network members have been able to maintain and improve access to primary care, dental care, behavioral health services, and other health-related services throughout the region. Currently, the ARHN is working on the following five major objectives: increasing access to mental health services, building oral health capacity, establishing a no-cost transportation system for the elderly and disabled, strengthening the effectiveness of pre-hospital care, and this region-wide community health assessment to identify unmet health care needs.

**Adirondack Rural Health
Network (ARHN):
Five-county Area**



Funding for the five-county regional community health assessment was provided by the New York State Department of Health, Office of Rural Health and by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Healthy Communities Access Program. For questions on the Adirondack Rural Health Network (ARHN), contact Vicky M. Wheaton, Director, Adirondack Rural Health Network, 1 Broad Street Plaza, Box 3253, Glens Falls, NY 12801, (518) 761-0300 Extension 210, vwheaton@medserv.net.