

SHIP sets sail to better health

The state of Maryland has embarked on an important method to address health disparities and improve the health of all Marylanders. The method is called the State Health Improvement Process, or SHIP, and your local health departments in Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties are working together on a regional plan to address local health priorities.

SHIP is based on 39 health indicators focused on several categories: healthy births, healthy social environments, safe physical environments, infectious disease, chronic disease and access to health care. The purpose of SHIP at the state and local levels is to make communities accountable for lessening disparities and improving the health of all residents by 2014 through implementing local action and engaging the public.

SHIP provides counties with tools to set local priorities and mobilize communities to improve residents' health.

Health improvement planning efforts in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester counties include collaboration of public health officials, community stakeholders, clinicians, business leaders, advocates, representatives from hospitals, human services and health consumers. The group leading the local effort is the Tri County Health Planning Board which has been conducting health needs assessments and

improvement planning since the 1990s. In previous years, each county represented on the board has developed its own county assessment and health improvement plan. Under the guidance of SHIP, the Tri-County Health Planning Board is now developing a formal Tri-County Health Improvement Plan.

The board is currently focused on addressing two priorities for Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties — diabetes and child/adolescent obesity — and developing a plan to improve levels of both priorities by 2014.

As assessments and planning efforts get underway throughout the state, there are steps people can take on their own to improve their health and ultimately their families, communities and our state. Public action can include seeing their primary care provider annually, quitting smoking, routinely seeing a dentist, being more physically active, eating right, getting tested for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, limiting alcohol and not abusing drugs, talking to their provider about depression and other unusual signs and getting help.

Tri-County Health Planning Board meetings take place from 9-11 a.m. the last Wednesday of each month until March and then as needed. These meetings are open to the public. The location for the meeting rotates. To find out where the next meeting

will be held, please contact your local health department. Additionally, the Worcester County Advisory Committee meetings are also open to the public and meet the third Thursday of each month. To find out about Worcester's meetings, please contact Jane Apson at 410-632-1100. The Wicomico Health Planning Board meets on the second Friday of the month. To find out more about Wicomico's meetings, contact Brenda Williams at 410-860-5493.

This is a monthly column produced by the health departments of Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties.