



# **Building Washington's Healthiest Community Through Engagement and Equity**

The Next Initiative

*Turning healthy individuals into a healthy community*

July 2009

Did you know that the latest research-based information health indicates that we are only as healthy as our community? While accessible medical care is important, we know that there are other behavioral factors, based on the equity of economic and social policies, that impact health even more than medical care. In fact, the issue of equity has a larger impact on health than does medical care and biology combined.

### **What is health equity?**

Equity in health means that all of us have an equal *opportunity* to be healthy: equal opportunities to get fresh vegetables (there are many neighborhoods that do not have a grocery store), equal opportunities to be able to hold a job (there are many neighborhoods that do not have transportation options that would make it possible to hold a job), equal opportunities for physical activities (there are many neighborhoods in which walking is impossible due to crime or lack of sidewalks), etc. Just about every aspect of how we live has an impact on equity and on health.

Here is where Community Choices is putting a stake in the ground - we are leading a new initiative that engages communities in the issue of health equity to make Clark County one of the healthiest communities in Washington, the State that is working toward being the healthiest one in the nation.

**We need your participation.** This document lays out our framework. We invite you to:

- Give us feedback and ask us questions about this issue
- Lend your ideas, time, and talents to help address it;
- Refer us to others who share this goal; and
- Help fund this effort

### **Mission**

To be a catalyst for a healthy livable community.

### **Community Choices' Aspirations**

- We aspire to make the community a place that balances economic vitality, personal health, social well being and sense of belonging;
- We aspire for a community representative and supportive of all people and embrace equity, including that associated with age, racial and ethnic backgrounds, cultures, religions, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and abilities;
- We aspire to make our community better through working together to respond as advocates and partners in long-term improvements.

### **Organizational Principles**

- We advocate for the community and convene diverse interests around policy issues;
  - We use data to highlight the need for change;
  - We use stories to inspire and connect to actions;
- We listen, engage and mobilize around issues that impact our environment, economy and social equity;

We believe engagement leads to education, better understanding, and improvements in overall health and well being of individuals and our community.



## **Why is Community Choices embarking on the health equity initiative?**

Since its inception, Community Choices has worked with businesses, governments, schools, and other non-profits to identify key health challenges facing our community. Those have been presented in the *Community Report Card* which is widely known and respected in and outside of Clark County. The 2009 report card will reflect health equity issues in response to a national awareness of their significance and the urgency to do something about them. Essentially, the data in the report will lead to a community call to action.

This is a natural progression for Community Choices. We are building upon our past successes including:

- Implementation of a national Fit Pick Healthy Vending initiative which is now providing healthy vending food choices by 22+ employers in Clark County;
- Creation of the Clark County Food System Council that is addressing farmland preservation, community gardens and access to grocery stores in underserved areas;
- Establishment of a bicycle/pedestrian advisory committee to the Columbia River Crossing project;
- Successful launch of the Washington Elementary "Walking School Bus" which has improved school attendance, reduced tardiness and increased the number children arriving in time for breakfast;
- Creation of the Clark County Walkaround Guide which is being used by over 43,000 households and 178 organizations to increase physical activity;
- Development of 8 Family Resource Centers which provide resources, services and activities for over 10,000 families in Clark County; and
- Implementing the *Steps to a Healthier Clark County* initiative which increased access to physical activity, healthy food, and smoke-free environments, and
- Bringing partners together to advocate for healthy transportation choices as an overall component of a healthy community

## **Why this should matter to all of us**

- As members of this community we all can make choices that reduce inequities and strengthen relationships and participation that leads to good health
- As community leaders we can use this information to influence social and economic policies that will ensure equal opportunities for all community members to be healthy
- As employers we can create organizational changes that optimize the health of our employees that leads to low turn over and high productivity
- As small business owners we can use the principles of health equity to influence our interaction with the community and generate more opportunities for business

We are ready! We will join you if you are already working on these issues. And if you are not, we would like you to join us.

To learn more and get involved go to [www.clarkcommunitychoices.com](http://www.clarkcommunitychoices.com) and contact Sheela Choppala-Nestor, Interim Executive Director  
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