

## Agencies review area health standards

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**By Deborah Gertz Husar**  
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With red pen in hand, Kathy Fauble quickly listed challenges facing the Western Illinois Area Health Education Consortium.

- \* Provider difficulty communicating with patients in the English as a Second Language population.
- \* An aging work force in health-care fields.
- \* How to share and connect with other geographic areas and academic institutions.

Putting the challenges on paper was a first step toward finding solutions, and looking at external forces and trends, opportunities and challenges was the final step in Adams County's Local Public Health System Assessment.

"It helps us understand what our priorities are going to be," Fauble said. "It's a good exercise for helping us see beyond our everyday work activities."

Representatives of county health-care providers and others came together Wednesday to review findings from a comprehensive assessment questionnaire completed in June and developed by the National Public Health Performance Standards Program to measure how well the local public health system provides 10 essential services.

"You want to understand how is the system functioning, then you want to move to strategic issues and action plans. That's where we're trying to move," said Mark Edgar of the Illinois Public Health Institute, which facilitated the assessment project. "What emerges from the assessment data is three or four things we can work on."

The lowest scores posted by the county came in three areas — linking people to needed personal health services, research for new insights and innovative solutions and assuring a competent work force.

"Knowing the atmosphere and environment here, good groups of people will coalesce around those strategic issues and good work will be accomplished," Edgar said.

Work already is under way, for example, on linking people to health-care services. "It's been a good validation of some of the projects we're already working on," said Julie Shepard, director of health promotion for the Adams County Health Department.

"There's excitement about starting new initiatives, new collaborations working with groups already existing on some of these issues. There's a lot of potential to take advantage of a lot of work already being done."

One key will be avoiding duplication.

"What we need to be real careful about at this stage is to build upon groups that already exist and how we can enhance what they're doing by using this information," Shepard said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did the initial data analysis, then the Illinois Public Health Institute did additional analysis and prepared a written report.

The assessment is the last of four community assessments and evaluations being done by the Alliance for Building Community. The alliance has adopted an assessment model called MAPP (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnership).

Working together on the assessment helps providers understand they're part of the county's larger public health picture. "We tend to focus on our own specific areas and tend to forget we're part of a larger system," said Barb Baker Chapin, director of development for Transitions.

"There's a real positive message from this assessment as well," Edgar said. "There's a lot of collaboration going on, a lot of good work, but with any system, there's always room for improvement."

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