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# Improving Community Health Focus of N.H. Institute for Health Policy and Practice Project

Nov. 3 Conference Highlights Project Activities and Offers Hands-on Workshop

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DURHAM, N.H. -- When citizens or organizations want to improve the health of their community, how do they know what the most pressing problems are and what to do about them?

The Empowering Communities project has developed tools and information to help answer these challenging questions. It is collaboration among the N.H. Institute for Health Policy and Practice (NHIHPP) at the University of New Hampshire, the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services (NHDHHS) and state community-based organizations and coalitions.

Funded by two grants from the Endowment for Health totaling \$419,000, the Empowering Communities project is focused on improving access to local data and providing training to help state and local leaders to effectively use public health data and information.

“The need to access local data was documented by citizens through the statewide health care planning process in 1998,” Holly DeBlois, project director, says. Public health and other data, she explains, are required to monitor, evaluate and improve local health programs, to develop health planning priorities and demonstrate need for local grant funding.

Community input was sought and used to shape data and training-related activities. The results include the creation of the NH Health Data Inventory ([www.nhhealthdata.org](http://www.nhhealthdata.org)), a Web site providing a description and access to available state health data sources such as vital statistics, hospitalizations, school district profiles, alcohol and tobacco use statistics and demographics.

Training-related activities include developing and offering skill-building sessions such as “Prove It!,” a beginner class on how to use health data when writing a grant proposal. Other activities include development of a Web site to help community leaders find proven solutions to health problems.

Dave Danielson, Bedford town counselor, attended the Prove It! training session at UNH this summer and says the Empowering Communities project offers invaluable assistance to local planners looking for ways to improve the health of their community.

“The course provided me a refresher on statistics, and taught me how to localize health data and communicate back to my colleagues what our community looks like,” says Danielson. “That data can help us better assess our populations and prioritize needs. For example I was surprised

by the quick growth of the over 50 group. What impact does this have and how will we address future needs?”

NHDHHS is leading the effort to build a Web-based data system capable of producing community health profiles. Provided confidentiality restrictions are followed, community leaders will be able to retrieve a report containing more than 200 health indicators for a town, a group of towns, as well as for many other geographic areas.

Community leaders will continue to benefit from the Empowering Communities program with the receipt of year three funding from the Endowment for Health in the amount of \$160,000.

The public is invited to learn about how the Empowering Communities project can assist them at a conference Monday, Nov. 3, 2003, in Concord at the Courtyard Marriott, Grappone Conference Center from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Participants will receive a summary of practical tools created by the project as well as a hands-on opportunity to develop or refine the aims of their community health improvement efforts through a workshop with community health experts.

The target audience for the training includes community leaders working or living in New Hampshire who are interested in improving the health of their communities. These include individuals from such organizations as social service agencies; hospitals; medical clinic; schools; police, fire and health departments; businesses; municipalities; and health coalitions.

Attendance is free. The registration deadline is Monday, Oct. 27. For more information, contact Holly DeBlois, project director, at the N.H. Institute for Health Policy and Practice at 603-862-4457. The project website is available at [www.nhhealthpolicyinstitute.unh.edu/EPC.html](http://www.nhhealthpolicyinstitute.unh.edu/EPC.html).