

San Juan Basin Health Department

Overview of Current Programs April 2009



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INTRODUCTION

San Juan Basin Health Department is a district health department serving primarily La Plata and Archuleta Counties, but also providing limited services to San Juan County and the southwest region. Offices are located at 281 Sawyer Drive in Durango and 502 South 8th Street in Pagosa Springs.

The definition of public health is what we, as a society, do to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy. As a Department, we work collaboratively with individuals and other community agencies to fulfill the intent of this definition.

Public health departments, as units of government, have the distinct responsibilities of community assessment, policy development, and assurance, which are further described through the 10 essential services under which we, as a health department organized under C.R.S. Part 5, have functioned for several decades.

The mission statement adopted by our Department is: to enhance the personal and environmental health of our community through education, collaboration, advocacy and the direct provision of services. Focus is on preventing disease and disability, promoting healthy lifestyle choices, preserving and restoring the environment, and assuring that basic health services are available for all.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY

The Department was established in 1948 by resolution of the County Commissioners, and for the past 60 years has operated under the guidance of a seven member Board of Health appointed by La Plata and Archuleta Counties.

DIVISIONS AND PROGRAMS

The Department is organized under eight basic Divisions: Stand Alone Programs, Reproductive Health Services, Communicable Disease Prevention and Surveillance, Children's Services, Family Health, Elderly/Disabled Support Services, Prevention & Community Health Promotion, and Environmental Health Services. Each Division contains a number of programs, described below.

The 2008 Projected figures and the 2009 Budget is provided, by Division, below.

Stand Alone Services

Disaster Emergency Planning

The purpose of the EPR program is to work with public health staff, health care providers, and other local and state response agencies to plan and prepare for the cooperative process that will be required to minimize the impact of public health emergencies on our citizens.

Biological Laboratory

The Laboratory analyzes quality of wastewater discharged from publicly owned treatment facilities throughout at least 7 counties in SW Colorado to ensure streams and rivers are not overloaded with sewage constituents and are compliant with State permit discharge requirements. The laboratory also provides well-water analysis for coliform bacteria and total dissolved solids (TDS) on privately owned wells in the Counties to assure they are not being adversely affected by contaminated surface or ground water.

Vital Statistics

Official birth and death certificates are available to the public through the Department, which is an essential service to the community. Perhaps more importantly, the information from birth and death certificates is collected locally and transmitted to the State Health Department. When compiled and analyzed, this data illustrates health trends and identifies risk factors that provide the basis to formulate programs and policies grounded in objective information.

Water Quality Control

The Department houses and supports the State Water Quality Control Division (WQCD) engineer who monitors water quality of lakes and streams, as well as large community public water supplies and sewage treatment facilities. His presence in our Department also affords our Department staff the opportunity to collaborate and provide mutual support in resolving common community concerns.

Reproductive Health Services

Prenatal Care/Centering Pregnancy

Prenatal medical care has been shown to be important in the birth of healthy and adequate birth weight babies. Beyond essential medical care, many of the prenatal clients seen through our Department have significant challenges in the psycho-social areas of being low income, having minimal family support, and/or dealing with social stresses such as substance abuse or domestic violence. All these factors, too, can have adverse effects on birth outcomes. In 2008, the Department moved to an evidence based public health model called Centering Pregnancy which assures that not only can low income women receive necessary medical care, but they also receive support for managing their psycho-social challenges through a group care model.

Prenatal Plus

Pregnant women who have Medicaid coverage and need even more individualized support to assure that their baby is born healthy and will come home to a healthy environment can receive the services of R.N. case management, nutritional consultation and social worker assistance under the Prenatal Plus Program.

Presumptive Eligibility

Our Department has the unique ability to register and “presume (clients) eligible” in order for them to receive the early prenatal care recommended beginning the critical 1st trimester of pregnancy rather than waiting for approval through the 45 day registration period allowed through Department of Human Services.

Family Planning

There is strong evidence that children who are mis-timed, unwanted or born to teenage parents face more health and social problems, are more likely to be lower income long term, and/or attain lower educational status than families where children are planned. The family planning program provides education, medical exams and birth control methods to low income women and teens who are sexually active and don't want to become pregnant. Working to get the Durango School Health Clinic designated as a satellite site of our program in 2008 represents a cutting edge model for promoting teen pregnancy prevention.

CWCCI (Women Wellness Connection)

Early detection of breast and cervical cancers improve the chance of successful treatment. This program provides mammograms, pap smears, exams and follow-up to low income women.

Communicable Disease Prevention & Surveillance

Immunizations

The availability of childhood immunizations has significantly decreased or virtually eliminated common diseases of childhood that, in the past, could result in secondary, debilitating complications and even, rarely, in death. Our Department assures that all children, regardless of financial or insured status, can obtain recommended immunizations. Immunization of adults, including international travelers, protects individuals, but is also decreases the pool of susceptible adults who transmit common diseases like pertussis. Promotion of flu and pneumonia vaccines in the high risk population reduces the toll of these diseases on our most vulnerable population sub-groups, particularly the very old and the very young.

Communicable Disease

A core function of local public health is to continuously monitor, report and follow up on communicable disease in the community in order to track disease trends and slow or stop transmission during disease outbreaks. The Department is also the local resource for both the public and the health care community in the area of communicable disease.

Tuberculosis Control

Called one of the greatest failures of our public health system, the recurrence of drug resistant and multi-drug resistant tuberculosis has changed our role in TB control to early detection and intervention, as well as commitment to “direct observe therapy”, which means personal monitoring of every medication administered for all who are diagnosed with active disease.

HIV Testing/Counseling/Tracking

Our Department provides both confidential and anonymous testing for HIV status, education and, starting in 2009, tracking and follow-up of newly diagnosed positives or for HIV positive persons new to our area. The tracking and follow-up was previously done by CDPHE, but it became too difficult and cumbersome for them to respond in a timely manner given the distances involved and their lack of familiarity with our community.

Children's Services

Dental

Good oral health is a crucial component of over-all health, and oral diseases, like many other diseases, are largely preventable. The need for preventive oral health and restorative care for low income children (and adults) was identified by our community as a critical need over 20 years ago. Seven years ago the Department was awarded a Colorado Trust grant to start a regional children's preventive oral health program in conjunction with area schools and preschools. Four years ago, after the preventive program had become self-sustaining, a grant from Caring for Colorado enabled us to add a restorative dental program, thus completing the oral health care system for this target population. In 2008, with no grant funding, the program was self-sustaining. In 2009, we hope to begin to also address the oral health needs of low income adults.

HCP (Children with Special Needs)

This program brings pediatric specialists who are not regularly accessible to our community to consult on complex neurological and rehabilitation issues confronted by special needs children. Our Department also provides the care coordination that children with multiple needs require to attain optimal functioning.

CDEC (Children's Diagnostic & Evaluation Clinic)

A multi-disciplinary team, in conjunction with a developmental pediatric specialist from the Denver area, evaluates children with delays in physical, social, educational, and/or emotional development and makes recommendations for improving outcomes for the family and child.

EPSDT Outreach/Medicaid and CHP+ Registration

It has been demonstrated that children who have access to early screening, diagnosis and treatment can be treated more effectively and efficiently than those who cannot access routine health care. Families are assisted with obtaining public insurance, informed about early screening and care availability, and assisted in any way necessary to obtain indicated treatments or therapies.

Child Health

Child health programming is based on periodic community assessment of child health needs. In the beginning of 2008, child health funding focused primarily on community education and proper installation of child car seats and assuring access to public insurance. The emphasis and funding during the latter part of the year and through 2009 was changed to increasing immunization rates through integration of the immunization program with district schools.

Comprehensive Child Care

In recognition that optimal child health is more than primary care, this grant program focuses on working with private providers and schools to establish a comprehensive system that includes preventive, oral and behavioral health in conjunction with routine well child care. It will also include development of the group health model where parents will learn to assess their child's health and share parenting tips in a mutually supportive group setting facilitated by various child health professionals.

Family Health

Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)

The David Olds model program of nurse home visitation to first time moms is based on a long term study that spanned over 15 years and demonstrated statistically significant improvement in parental lifestyle choices, education, and financial status, as well as positive long term outcomes for the children relating to school success, health habits, and decreased involvement in the judicial and human services systems. R.N.'s follow families beginning during pregnancy and on-going until the child reaches age two.

Nurturing Parenting

Many studies have shown that children raised in abusive and neglectful homes tend to raise their children as they were raised, thereby repeating the cycle generation after generation. Nurturing Parenting is another evidence based program that helps parents learn parenting skills and empathy that are nurturing and then gives them an opportunity to practice these new techniques between classes over a period of 16 weeks, supplemented by home visits if indicated.

Women's, Infant's & Children's (WIC) Nutrition Program

High nutrient foods are particularly critical to adequate growth during the prenatal and early infancy/ childhood phase of development. The WIC program provides nutrition education and vouchers to purchase high nutrient foods for pregnant and breast feeding women and children up to the age of five.

Parents Plus (TANF Nurse Home Visitation)

This is a nurse home visitation program loosely structured using ideas from the David Olds program and patterned after the Young Parents Program in Montezuma County. Funded through the La Plata County Department of Human Services, it has the flexibility to meet individual family needs, to serve mothers and families that already have children, and to target families who are receiving services through the Temporary Aide to Needy Families program with Department of Human Services.

Elderly/Disabled Support Services

Home Health

Persons who are elderly and/or disabled are generally healthier and happier if they can live as independently as possible in their own homes or in assisted living facilities. The primary goal of the home health program is to provide a skilled level of health care in the home, including services of a registered nurse, home health aide, physical and occupational therapies, speech/language therapy, and psychological support, to enable patients to regain an optimal level of health and attain the goal of independent living. Our program primarily serves patients who need a broad range of support services (listed below), tend to be long term, cannot be served by other agencies, and/or need the services of a wound care specialist.

Personal Care Services

Personal care services provided in the home assure that, beyond getting the skilled services of home health care, frail elderly or disabled persons can also have their most basic and essential needs met, such as obtaining prescribed medications and groceries, receiving assistance with bathing and personal hygiene, and having help with minor housekeeping. Often without these basic supportive services, nursing home placement would be the only alternative. Over the years our Department has been successful in pooling a number of small revenue sources, including CSBG funds, Area Agency on Aging monies, and rotary contributions to supplement medicaid funding, thereby serving a broader population than any other agency can serve.

Eye & Ear

Sensory impairment is another critical factor that can interfere with a person's ability to live independently. This program helps low income adults obtain hearing aides and eye glasses and covers part of the costs.

Single Entry Point

Again, given the above stated purpose to helping elderly and disabled persons to remain in their homes, the Single Entry Point Program, under the Department of Health Care Policy and Finance, assures that those individuals whose functional level would most likely result in nursing home placement within a month and who are also financially eligible for medicaid assistance can receive the support needed to remain in their homes or in the least restrictive setting for as long as possible.

Senior Exercise Program

Modified Tai Chi classes offered to seniors have been demonstrated to help them regain mobility and thus reduced their risk of falls, which is the most common form of unintentional injury leading to death in the elderly.

Senior Outreach

Registered nurses reach out to isolated and rural elderly to assess their health status and to assist them in accessing needed services to enhance health and well-being, again allowing them to improve health status and maintain greater independence.

Prevention / Community Health Promotion

Methamphetamine Use

About five years ago, the Department, in partnership with the D.A.'s office, put together a collaboration of community agencies with the common purpose of increasing community awareness about the dangers of methamphetamine use. The program has offered videos, brochures and speakers regionally and statewide, and has had a positive influence on decreasing new meth use locally. Treatment and community re-integration of former meth users are components that have been added over the last three years under a grant from the Colorado Trust.

Tobacco (STEPP)

Tobacco use remains the leading cost of death in the United States, although our local program has been successful in lowering rates significantly over the past several years. The program focuses on prevention and cessation, and targets those groups that have the highest tobacco use rates. Since our Lasso Tobacco coalition and our local program has been exemplary in the state, our program coordinator also receives funds to mentor neighboring county public health services.

LEAF (Law Enforcement Assistance Fund)

Substance abuse that begins during adolescence tends to be more serious and difficult to treat than when it begins later in life. This program focuses on giving high risk youth the skills and opportunities to choose a healthier lifestyle. Another grant beginning in 2009 will emphasize teen pregnancy prevention in this target population in collaboration with the Reproductive Health Division.

Chronic Disease Prevention (Promoviendo la Salud)

The Latino population tends to have higher incidence of certain chronic diseases, such as diabetes, and less access to primary care than the population as a whole. This program provides outreach to the community through the evidence based model of using “promotoras”, accepted members of the Latino community, to outreach to this target population for health education, screening and follow-up under the guidance of a registered nurse. The program now includes a primary care clinic which is held three times/month to treat identified health problems and provide chronic disease management.

Community Health Outreach

This program provides health education and screening to the un and under-insured working poor in the community at common worksites or community gathering places. The goal is to prevent cardiovascular disease through promotion of healthier lifestyles, identification of risk factors or early symptoms of disease, and providing help obtaining the treatment necessary to limit disease chronicity.

Environmental Health

On-site Waste Water Program

Improper disposal of sewage leads to contamination of groundwater and surface water, spread of sewage-borne diseases and, at times, costly damage to homes and the community. Assuring that everyone had access to a safe water supply was the major factor in significantly increasing life expectancy during the 20th century. While most people take this for granted in our country, without on-going efforts, incidence of gastro-intestinal disease due to drinking water contamination would quickly increase. Our Department issues permits and inspects on-site systems in order to maintain a safe and clean water supply for residents and neighbors. As more and more pollutants enter our air and water supplies, the more this program will need to evolve and change.

Food Safety/Consumer Protection

The Food Safety Inspection and Training programs protect the public from food borne illnesses including the more prominent e- coli, salmonella, botulism, campylobacter, lysteria, hepatitis, chemicals, and others. Consumer protection assures that all products and

foods purchased for home use are safe, and includes public awareness efforts when products that are considered unsafe are discovered.

Plan Reviews

Proposed land use development plans are reviewed in all aspects that have environmental implications, including review of the sanitation elements to ensure compliance with sanitation laws, protection of surface waterways and shallow aquifers, potential of uncontrolled sewage migration, risk to water supplies, and compliance with the State Storm Water Management Program. The Department also encourages planning of alternative transportation routes (bike or pedestrian path easements), preservation of wild riparian corridors, and control of fugitive emission sources (dirt roads, sources of smoke, etc.).

Air Quality

Our Department addresses complaints from the community about localized air quality issues and, through on-site inspections and follow-up, seeks to resolve the problem. Issues range from inter-neighborhood squabbles regarding road dust to greater concerns like open burning of large amounts of trash and/or inappropriate/dangerous materials. The Department conducts local coarse particulate monitoring (PM10) for the State Health Department and works with CDPHE and local agencies and organizations to mitigate identified high risk areas. The Department also monitors local conditions that may affect the health of residents of the region on a short term basis and disseminates information on special precautions that may be indicated. Finally, the local public health department has a responsibility to advocate for improvements needed to preserve and enhance air quality and protect human health.

Radon

Radon exposure is the second leading cause of lung cancer deaths in the United States. Radon levels in the Durango area are further exacerbated by uranium mill tailings that were once used as fill throughout local building and road construction. The Department provides classes and training on radon testing to the public free of charge and provides radon test kits. The Department is in the process of mapping the prevalence of radon levels throughout La Plata County. The education and testing program has resulted in the identification of many dozens of homes with serious radon level concerns, leading to radon mitigation and prevention of lung cancer.

Non-Community Groundwater Systems

Conducting inspections of smaller, but still public water systems (PWS) on a routine basis is an important element in preventing contamination of drinking water supplies and the prevention of serious water borne outbreaks.

Storm Water Management Program

The ultimate goal of this program is to keep pollutants that range from dirt and organic materials to trash and petroleum products out of receiving waters. Clearing or construction involving more than one acre of land is subject to the SWMP regulations. The program minimizes excessive or uncontrolled run-off and decreases the degradation, reduces pollution, and prevents destructive silting of waterways.

Zoonosis (W. Nile Virus, Plague, others)

The zoonosis program includes the monitoring of local conditions which may indicate increased risk to deadly disease transmitted from animals to humans. These conditions include Department investigations of prairie dog die-offs, carcass testing, mosquito trapping and examination, and educational efforts. Diseases endemic to this area include, but are not limited to: Hantavirus, Plague, Rabies, Tularemia, West Nile