

# Cooley Dickinson Health Care Healthy Communities Committee

## Summary of Community Health Forum Easthampton Community Center

### I. Overview

On September 18, 2013 a 90-minute community forum on health issues in the city of Easthampton was conducted at the Easthampton Community Center. Twenty-three (23) individuals attended; 19 women and 4 men. The diverse group of participants included: health care providers, state and local health officials including Ms. Jackie Duda, Director of the Easthampton Health Department, a representative from the Mayor's Office, prevention specialists, public health nurses, public school personnel, community-based organization staff such as Casa Latina and the Easthampton Housing Partnership, new and long-standing city residents, members and leaders of the Easthampton Community Center.

A key goal of the forum was to obtain local input on the priority health issues facing the city of Easthampton and how best to mitigate and address these priorities. Additional goals included obtaining participant reaction to and feedback on the results derived from previously conducted health needs assessment surveys, focus groups, and key informant interviews. We sought to know if the data obtained from those activities "rang true" and were in accordance with what participants know and experience related to health needs in the city. Participants were also asked for their ideas on how Cooley Dickinson Hospital and its community partners, such as local officials and providers, could work together more collaboratively and effectively to address Easthampton's most pressing health issues.

### II. Key Themes and Priorities

a. **Easthampton has significant community assets and resources** that positively support health and should be enhanced to further improve the quality of life such as:

- Bike path for walking, hiking; sidewalks and a 'walkable' downtown
- Beautiful mountain views, scenery, and conservation lands
- Thriving arts and artists' community
- Great local businesses: Big E's; Easthampton Savings Bank
- Farmers Market, especially helpful in winter
- Healthy restaurants with a wide variety of food options and smokefree facilities
- Active senior outreach and Senior Center programs

b. However, **Easthampton also has significant needs for improvement in community health services and health-promoting policies/practices** such as:  
(in order of priority from highest to lowest)

- More accessible and frequent transportation, especially to and from medical clinics and the hospital; for example, for one to travel from Easthampton to Holyoke, an individual has to go through Northampton first
- Smoking rates are too high
  - tobacco use prevention and cessation programs need to be locally available and expanded
  - reduce exposure to 2nd-hand smoke, especially for young children
  - Smoke-free housing must be available in all publicly and privately managed multi-dwelling units and apartment buildings
- Drug use/abuse treatment programs are not available locally
- Urgent care clinic or walk-in health care for those with no health insurance
- Improved access to affordable health insurance; people living near the poverty line or the 'working poor' may make just enough money to not qualify for public health insurance, but are unable to afford private insurance
- More widespread availability of information and referral resources, both in online and hard copy formats; residents need to know more about existing free services and how to access them

### **III. Summary and Next Steps**

- Based on the issues raised in the forum, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, in partnership with Easthampton health care providers and other service agencies, should further explore: 1) improving transportation services, 2) expanding tobacco use prevention, cessation and smoke-free housing programs, and 3) the availability of urgent medical care and substance abuse treatment resources.
- Although it did not rise to the level of highest priority, participants also mentioned concerns about obesity. Together with the high-priority tobacco use issues raised and known Easthampton data about heart disease rates, this may suggest the opportunity to support a comprehensive cardio-vascular disease prevention and risk reduction program.
- Participating agencies represented at the forum expressed willingness to participate in additional meetings and discussion to further develop plans, work together to establish needed programs, and to better promote and coordinate existing services in Easthampton.