

## **WHAT IS THE CHAB?**

The Community Health Advisory Board of Island County is composed of volunteers appointed by the county's Board of Health to advise them on issues that impact the health of the people of the county. We refer to the board by its initials, C-H-A-B, or CHAB. Our brochure, in your handouts, is a handy introduction to our organization.

The CHAB is charged to monitor the health status of the people of the county. We identify issues by collecting and analyzing data and by listening to the concerns expressed by individuals in various forums. Using this information, we identify needs and sets priorities for community services in public health, and compare these with current policies and programs affecting public health. We develop action plans for issues that can be addressed by people acting independently or in partnerships; and we develop recommendations for changes to policy and programs, which we present to the Island County Board of Health.

The CHAB membership can range from 9 to 21, plus an *ex officio* member, the county health officer, and up to 8 student members, 2 from each of the high schools in the county. Members are selected to balance representation across not only the geography of the county, but also across the functional systems of the county. Geographically, our members come from 4 regions – north, central, and southern Whidbey Island, and Camano Island. Functionally, we have members involved in healthcare delivery, public health, business, social services, and military and religious organizations, to name a few. Our goal is to have members representing a wide range of interests, perspectives and experiences. Our members serve 3 year terms, with many extending to 5 or 6 years, or even more. This adds to the overall wisdom inherent in such a group while maintaining continuity of our process and an understanding of our mission.

There's a short list of selected accomplishments in our brochure; the complete list is on our web site – the current URL is in the attached reference list, the one in the brochure is no longer valid.

## **HOW WAS THE CHAB FORMED?**

As some of you may recall, during the early 1990s there was strong support, both at the national and the state level, for health agencies to engage in the three core functions of public health – assessment, assurance and policy development. In particular, there was an emphasis on conducting formal community health assessments to assist in policy development and to assure appropriate health service delivery. The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) were developing the APEX/PH: Assessment Protocol for Excellence in Public Health to serve as a guide to encourage local health departments to develop a community process to identify and address local health care problems, to share

information and work in partnership with their communities to improve health, and to periodically evaluate their efforts.

Locally, these efforts were incorporated into a realization that the public's health could best be improved by bringing the public into the process, as outlined in the 1<sup>st</sup> slide in your handouts. This led the Board of Island County Commissioners to revise the county code to establish, in November 1992, the Community Health Advisory Board (Resolution HD-10-92, ICC Chapter 8.13 : Community Health Advisory Board). The functional relationships among the participants in the CHAB's processes are diagrammed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> slide in your handouts.

## WHAT DOES THE CHAB DO?

The CHAB meets as a whole for 2 hours each month, but the real action occurs in the committee and action team meetings that occur in between. We have the usual complement of internally-focused committees such as Leadership and Membership, and we have several externally-focused committees that carry out the continuing or recurring business of the CHAB.

- The CHAB and the Board of Health jointly present the annual Linda Lee Martens Health Heroes of Island County awards. These awards recognize and celebrate individuals and organizations of our community who make a difference in the lives of the people of Island County.
- Data collection and analysis is essential to many of our efforts. We have developed key indicators to track health status here in the county, and indicator performance is tracked and reported annually. This year, we are developing a set of questions for use in the county during the periodic BRFSS, or Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance Survey. A copy of our Key Indicators report is attached.
- We review the budget submission of the Health Department every other year, and submit recommendations to the Board of Health on program priorities.
- We provide members to the Steering Committee for the Environmental Health Assessment Team, that was briefed previously by Jim Patton.
- We communicate our progress and results both to the Board of Health and to the community.
  - ❖ On an *ad hoc* basis, we use available media to address issues with the community, for example, through articles in local newspapers.
  - ❖ Every 3 months, we provide a status report to the Board of Health at one of the board's regularly scheduled public meetings.

- ❖ On an annual basis, we deliver a report to the Board of Health and to the community on the state of the community's health and our efforts on the community's behalf. This report is made at the annual dinner for the presentation of the Linda Lee Martens Health Heroes of Island County awards.

From the beginning, the CHAB has actively participated in a number of community health assessments. We use a community-based health collaboration model that takes about 3 to 4 years to complete, as shown in the 3<sup>rd</sup> slide in your handouts. The model includes assessing and prioritizing issues, forming teams, writing action plans and initiating efforts to implement them, and evaluating processes and impacts, prior to beginning the cycle again.

Our most recent assessment identified 4 top priority health issues for the Island County community. As shown in the 4<sup>th</sup> slide in your handouts, these are (1) early support for children and young families; (2) preventive health and screening; (3) mental health services and resources; and (4) physical activity and chronic disease.

We have 2 health action teams working on the top priority issue, education and support for parents of infants and young children.

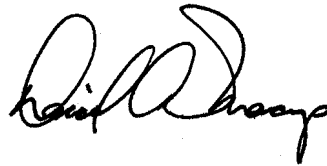
- The 1<sup>st</sup> team is assessing the feasibility of developing a Children's Fund, which would provide a means for raising additional funds locally through charitable giving, funds that will be directed to agencies and organizations that help children in Island County. This team is exploring various models of fundraising that might work in the communities of our county.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> team has developed a recommendation to start a Children's Commission to serve as a coordinating and advocacy group for the many organizations and agencies providing services to children in Island County. This commission would be appointed by the county commissioners to advise them on the needs of children and their families, facilitate collaborative efforts among agencies providing services, advocate for the community, and sponsor community-wide discussions on children's issues.

We are proud of the impact we have had. Across the continuum of Children's and Adolescents' Health, for example, there are now more classes being offered, more parent support groups, and more trained parent and early childhood educators offering a range of parent education resources in our local communities. We also worked with Whidbey General Hospital to recruit and retain a child-adolescent psychiatrist, and we have a Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan with 13 recommendations focused on future work.

Finally, please note that the CHAB does not function in a vacuum. I want to acknowledge 2 elements of support the CHAB receives which are essential if **any** volunteer group is to function well over time.

- First is administrative and technical support, which is provided by the Island County Health Department. The CHAB would have neither data to evaluate nor the means to communicate if not for the support of the Health Department.
- Second is sponsorship and attentiveness, which is provided by the Island County Board of Health. Members of the CHAB would drift away if there was no interest in their work and their contributions were not welcomed. While we may at times disagree on specifics, we understand the Board of Health remains interested in our efforts and accepting of our input.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Macys". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "M".

David A. Macys  
CHAB Liaison to the  
Island County Board of Health

## USEFUL REFERENCES

- A. The CHAB web site has much useful information about Island County and its people, the CHAB's Special Health Reports and their findings and recommendations, and current progress reports. The URL is :

<http://www.islandcounty.net/health/CHAB/default.htm>

- B. Two references, among many others, provide both practical and theoretical support for the use of citizens advisory boards like Island County's Community Health Advisory Board (CHAB) and Environmental Health Assessment Team (EHAT).

- (1) The first is the 1997 report (in 2 volumes) of the Presidential/Congressional Commission on Risk Assessment and Risk Management. In volume 1, there is an excellent discussion on the importance of involving stakeholders in the entire process of public risk decision making, based on the pragmatic assessment that decisions made this way are more acceptable to the public and more likely to be implemented.

The citation is

Omenn GS, Chiu PY, Kessler AC, *et al.* (1997). *Framework for Environmental Health Risk Management*. Presidential/Congressional Commission on Risk Assessment and Risk Management, Washington DC.

And the documents are located online at

<http://www.riskworld.com/riskcommission/Default.html>

- (2) The second is the proceedings of a workshop held in 1992 to review various methods for incorporating citizen participation in environmental decision making so that the resultant policies are perceived as being both effective in protecting the environment and fair in their representation of public values. Citizen advisory committees are specifically addressed in chapters 4 and 5.

Renn O, Webler T, Wiedemann P (eds.) (1995). *Fairness & Competence in Citizen Participation: Evaluating Models for Environmental Discourse*. Kluwer Academic, Boston MA.

In addition to providing a strong theoretical background for the value of citizen (stakeholder) participation in the public decision making process generally, the text also provides an analysis of the specific strengths and weaknesses of each method and recommendations for process improvements.