



Panhandle Health District

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Panhandle Health District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Melanie Collett

(208) 415-5108

Survey Says... Obesity and Mental Health Top Health Problems for North Idaho

HAYDEN, ID – Panhandle Health District (PHD), in conjunction with the hospitals in Kootenai, Boundary, Bonner, Shoshone and Benewah Counties, is presenting its Community Health Improvement Plan – developed to increase the overall health status of North Idaho. After two years of surveying local community members and health care providers, obesity and mental health have been determined as the top health issues.

“The ultimate goal is to improve the health of our citizens,” said PHD Director, Lora Whalen. “Obesity and mental health have been persistent problems, and we are taking action – turning these problems into priorities for the entire community.”

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), there are an estimated 17,700 (23%) overweight and obese high school students in Idaho. To combat this, Panhandle Health District is leading the Let’s Move! initiative in Kootenai County, which increases access to healthy food and physical activities and decreases screen time for children in childcare centers. Color Me Healthy is another obesity prevention program for preschoolers to learn healthy habits through games, songs and exploration. Local contributors, like the Idaho Community Foundation have helped launch this program to success in all five northern counties. For adults, PHD is supporting work sites to improve employee wellness programs. Studies have shown that healthier food at work and incentives for participating in physical activity lead to better weight management.

“Prevalence of obesity causes more chronic conditions, like heart-disease. The rising trend will likely lead to shorter life spans,” Whalen continued. “And physical health is closely related to mental health. Mental illnesses can affect a person’s ability to participate in health-promoting behaviors.”

Mental health disorders are among the most common causes of disability in our area and Idaho consistently has high suicide rates. Panhandle Health District is working with

community partners to increase resources, like the Idaho Suicide hotline, and recruit more mental health providers in our community.

“I am hopeful that we will see a crisis center in North Idaho. This would be an invaluable resource for those suffering from mental health crisis,” Whalen stated. “By building upon the strengths of our vibrant community, we can improve our mental health and obesity rates. Elected officials, hospitals, business owners and community members all play a major role in tackling these issues.”

According to the community health survey, other issues of concern are diabetes, smoking, cancer, child abuse and teen pregnancy. All of which, the Panhandle Health District is addressing directly. You can view the full improvement plan [here](#).

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