Celebrating National Public Health Week

Each year the first week in April is celebrated as National Public Health Week, a time to shine a light on all the ways that public health efforts benefit society. Public Health differs from health care in that it focuses on disease prevention and intervening actions aimed at the population as a whole, versus a doctor diagnosing and treating one patient at a time. Both public health and health care are vital for the overall health of our community, but public health is generally less understood.

In rural areas, like Southern Illinois, work by public health authorities is critical. Rural Americans have higher rates of high blood pressure, diabetes and cigarette smoking. Rural residents are at higher risk for poor health outcomes than urban residents. Access to health care is lower in rural areas due to fewer providers and facilities, with access to specialty care most impacted. Transportation barriers also impact access to care. Overall, rural residents face greater risks of death from heart disease, stroke, cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease, unintentional injury from motor vehicle crashes, and opioid overdoses than urban residents. Rural public health departments place a high importance upon addressing these health disparities and continuously strive to bring health outcomes more in line with those in urban areas.

Jackson County Health Department monitors health trends, and works with numerous community partners to develop and implement interventions to address rural health challenges. Often times, the work of public health departments is done in the background, out of the public view. This work often focuses on prevention of disease, which is difficult to measure, and subtle in approach. The COVID-19 pandemic placed public health departments more in the public spotlight, and Jackson County Health Department received much praise for its work to communicate with the public, help prevent the spread of disease, and to administer over 70,000 doses of vaccine. Even though the severity of the pandemic has subsided, Jackson County Health Department continues to serve the public health needs of our clients and the community, just as it has since 1950.

According to Bart Hagston, Administrator, “All of this work doesn’t happen without you, our supporters in the community. During National Public Health Week, Jackson County Health Department extends its thanks to our supporters and we look forward to continuing our role as your trusted public health partner.” In addition, during National Public Health Week, which this year occurs April 3-9, Hagston says “Thank you to our dedicated and professional staff, who’s commitment to excellence is unwavering and improves the lives of so many residents.”

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