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NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH WEEK, APRIL 4 – 10, 2016
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During the first full week of April each year, American Public Health Association (APHA) brings together communities across the United States to observe National Public Health Week as a time to recognize contributions of public health and highlight issues that are important to improving our nation. For over 20 years, APHA has served as the organizer of NPHW (National Public Health Week). Every year, the Association develops a national campaign to educate the public, policymakers and practitioners about issues related to each year's theme.

This year’s theme is “Healthiest Nation 2030”. Dr. Lee Smith, Executive Director of Monongalia County Health Department and County physician, commented on each of this year’s issues:

Healthy Communities: One of the basic requirements of public health is community support and to help prioritize perceived needs of the community. Healthy communities generate their own rewards in creating a health environment that retains and attracts residents, visitors and businesses.

Help all young people to graduate from high school: The evidence is clear that dropping out of high school is a sure path to lower paying jobs, diminished incomes and poorer neighborhoods. Poverty and poor education are directly linked to poor health. It is essential in having healthy communities so that our young people can achieve a higher level of education in order to secure a sustainable and well-paying job.

The relationship between increased economic mobility and better health: It is unfortunate that many people may choose to leave our economically depressed areas to find an adequate job with sufficient pay, security, and chance of advancement. This puts an unhealthy stress on adults and children who are leaving or staying behind. The reversal of this situation is very dependent on the presence of sustainable healthy communities to attract additional industry and businesses that can provide enough jobs to make it more desirable to stay rather than leave.

Social injustice and health: Inequities exist both blatantly and subtly that result in barriers that keep people from having an equal opportunity to improve their lives and their health. Healthy communities act to remove those barriers to bring about equity in health care because every person has an equal right to good health.

Give everyone a choice of healthy food: Wholesome, nutritious, and affordable foods are essential to an individual’s health and building healthy communities. Access to these foods is an important part of health equity and attempts should be made at every level to ensure that both children and adults have every opportunity in the choice of healthy food. Public health attempts to ensure that those things we eat are free from harmful contaminations and that the water we drink is safe.

Preparing for the health effects of climate change: Whether it be man-made or a natural occurring event, change is inevitable. What is important is how we handle that change. Understanding and managing our resources in this continually changing environment requires us to be flexible and to maximize all efforts to continue to sustain a healthy community environment.
Provide quality healthcare for everyone: In 1965 Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law Medicare as a national healthcare program for seniors. Since that time, we have seen many healthcare programs on the federal, state and local levels. Some of them have been productive and some not so productive. Some received resistance and some received acceptance. However, none of these healthcare programs have been perfect. There still remains many inequities in access and delivery of healthcare throughout our nation. Our efforts should be aimed at improving services and the safety net for those families and individuals who may fall through the cracks.

Strengthen the public health infrastructure: Public health provides an essential public function not unlike that of the police or fire department who also protect people's lives. Public health routine services include, inspecting restaurants to make sure the food is handled properly, inspecting swimming pools to make sure they are not contaminated with bacteria and many other public health duties that go unnoticed by the public. Public health also responds to unexpected health emergencies such as an infectious disease outbreak. To keep the public safe and healthy, public health needs to continue to receive adequate yearly funding that allows it to provide the community with public health services on a timely basis.

In summary, Dr. Smith stated that "Good health is an investment that requires a strong and consistent funding from federal, state, and local entities to ensure that there is an equity in its access and delivery. Failure to do so will result in pockets where poor health, poverty, and poor education result in a sustained downward spiral and unhealthy communities. Many times decision-makers only plan for the short term. With no long-view as to establishing the necessary and critical steps to prolonged and self-sustaining public health infrastructure. Public health is an integral part in maintaining a sustainable healthy community. Public health should be invested in so that there can be healthy communities, improved living standards, improved business communities, and equal access to quality healthcare delivery".

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