

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive
Donna Greene and Victoria Hochman, Directors of Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 26, 2009

NEW COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT RELEASED

If you want to know more about the health of Westchester residents, the Community Health Assessment, 2010-2013, is a valuable online resource. The Community Health Assessment evaluates the availability and accessibility of health care services, identifies service gaps and barriers that keep residents from obtaining care and sets out the priorities and activities of the Westchester County Department of Health.

The 361-page document is prepared every four years and used by the county to support state aid reimbursement and to inform and develop the county's public health priorities and service plans. The Community Health Assessment also provides demographic information useful to marketers, grant-writers and researchers. To view the Community Health Assessment, go to www.westchestergov.com/health and click on Data and Reports.

“In this difficult fiscal climate, this new Community Health Assessment can help communities, hospitals and health and human services agencies best determine where to focus their limited resources,” said County Executive Andy Spano. “While the overall assessment tells us that Westchester residents enjoy an excellent quality of life, it also demonstrates that under my direction, the health department is making the right moves to encourage residents to exercise more and eat healthier so we can reduce the incidence of chronic diseases and address health disparities.”

The Community Health Assessment also includes an interactive component that needs public input. It includes preliminary results from a consumer survey designed to help determine health care needs and service gaps. While 405 consumers participated, a broader spectrum of participants is needed to more accurately represent county residents. To participate in the survey, go to tiny.cc/survey855.

“With the help of the Board of Health and the Board of Legislators, the Westchester County Health

More

Department has been working toward the goal of a healthier quality of life for all Westchester residents,’’ said Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua Lipsman. “To do this we have drawn attention to calorie counts and allergens, banned oils containing trans-fats from restaurants, coordinated health screenings, connected residents with appropriate follow-up care and demonstrated healthier ways to cook soul food and Caribbean cuisine.’’

The Community Health Assessment provides a snapshot of the health status of residents, with age and region profiles expanded to provide more detailed information. According to the Community Health Assessment, nearly 90 percent of Westchester County residents age 18 and older rated themselves as being in good to excellent health in 2008. More women in Westchester (92%) reported they were in good or excellent health compared to the state average (83%). Unlike New York state, income did not play a significant role in people’s self-reporting of their health status in Westchester. Among those with incomes reported lower than 25,000, Westchester residents had a higher percentage of people reporting good or excellent health (99%), compared to the state average, (62%). Among Westchester residents, 7 percent described themselves as current smokers, well below the 17% state average.

On the down side, three of every five Westchester residents reported being overweight or obese, on par with the statewide average. Men were more likely to be overweight or obese (74%), as compared to women (43%).

Cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in Westchester County, with 2,725 deaths, or 40 percent of total deaths in 2007. The second most common cause of death was cancer, with 1,678, or 24.7 percent of total deaths.

In 2008, there were 111,638 hospital discharges. Excluding newborns and hospitalizations due to complications of pregnancy, labor and childbirth, the top five causes of hospitalization were: circulatory system disease, 13.9 percent; mental disorders, 8 percent; digestive system diseases, 8 percent; respiratory system diseases, 7 percent; and cancer, 5.4 percent.

For the first time, the Community Health Assessment now includes data on why people visit hospital emergency rooms. In 2008, 295,123 emergency room visits were reported by Westchester County residents. Injuries were the top cause of ER visits, with 71,070 visits, or 24.1 percent. Acute respiratory infections were the second most common reason for an ER visit, with 14,845.