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NEWS RELEASE

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Multnomah County Health Department addresses health inequities

A new report, "[Multnomah County Health Department Programs and Activities to Address Health Inequities](#)", describes the Health Department's work to address health inequities or disparities. The National Institutes of Health has defined a health disparity as "a population-specific difference in the presence of disease, health outcomes, or access to care."

Most health disparities affect groups that are already at a disadvantage because of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability status or some combination of these. People in such groups not only experience worse health, but also tend to have less access to the conditions that support health, such as healthy food, good housing, good education, safe neighborhoods, and freedom from racism and other forms of discrimination. Health disparities are referred to as health inequities when they are the result of the systemic and unequal access to these basic needs.

The Multnomah County Health Department has made the elimination of health disparities a top priority, and provides and supports many health programs and services to address this issue. Programs highlighted in the report include:

[Healthy Homes-Home Visiting Asthma Program](#) addresses disparities in the rates of asthma among low income families. Oregonians from households with an income of less than \$15,000 consistently report higher percentages of asthma than all other income levels. This program works with low income families who have children with asthma, providing education to take greater control over their asthma, including increased knowledge of medication and reducing household asthma triggers.

[The Healthy Birth Initiative](#) tackles disparities in perinatal health among African American women in North and Northeast Portland. In the 2001-2005 time period, there were 8.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births for African Americans compared to 4.9 infant deaths per 1,000 live births for White non-Hispanics. The Healthy Birth Initiative aims to reduce the rates of infant mortality and low-birth-weight babies, and to improve the health and well-being of mothers, fathers and their children, before, during and in between pregnancies.

[The Youth Violence Prevention Partnership](#) addresses the disparity in the level of violence affecting youth of color and youth living in poverty by building relationships between youth and police officers. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among 10 to 24 year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans; the second leading cause of death for Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islanders; and the third leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives. The program connects police officers with youth to achieve the goal of preventing violence affecting youth through building mutual trust, overcoming stereotypes, increasing empowerment, and promoting a positive outlook for the future.

[HIV Care Services](#) addresses disparities in healthcare access by providing medical care and support services for low-income people living with HIV disease. The percentage of people living with HIV disease that are also poor, and/or need treatment for mental health or substance abuse issues is much higher than in the general public. While 11% of the general population in the metro area is below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), 68% of those living with HIV/AIDS are below 100% of FPL. In the general population, an estimated 23% are diagnosed with mental illness compared to 53% of those living with HIV/AIDS.

The full report is available at: http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/health/hra/reports/addressing_inequities_2009.pdf

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