

Healthy Families, Healthy Communities

By David Rebanal

How do we pursue a “safe” and “healthy” lifestyle? When we are sick, we go to the doctor. When our child has a hard fall, we seek medical care. Beyond these medical measures, are there ways that we can be safe and healthy in our day-to-day lives? Pursuing a safe and healthy lifestyle means that we breathe clean air, and that we eat fresh foods. To accomplish this, agencies reduce air emissions, and increase our access to healthy agriculture. Pursuing a safe and healthy lifestyle means that we can walk or ride a bike to school or work. To



David with daughters, Ophelia, 7, and Tatiana, 4.

accomplish this, agencies promote bike helmet use and create bike lanes. Pursuing a safe and healthy lifestyle means that we are diligent about preventive care. To accomplish this, organizations need to offer easily accessible and affordable screenings, and testing. All of these ways that we pursue a safe and healthy lifestyle are matters of public health, and all of these matters are of utmost importance to the quality of life for Portland families.

Public health programs that focus on prevention and wellness are responsible for improving the quality of life in our communities. These programs are effective because they focus on communities, not just individuals. Solving our community's most common health problems – of course – includes reforming our healthcare system. More importantly, it also includes improving the conditions where we live, work, and play so that healthy choices are much easier to make. Not only will our families be safer and healthier, but our children's classmates, our neighbors, and our colleagues will all be safer and healthier, too.

Community Health Priorities (CHP) is a statewide initiative aimed at organizing people to make our communities healthier. Our goal is to engage people all over the state to articulate a vision of a healthier life for everyone and to then develop policies that help us achieve that vision. We are engaging neighborhood groups, schools and social networks, membership and faith-based organizations to stimulate public conversation about health in our communities.

We want to know what public health issues Oregonians care about most, develop a comprehensive knowledge bank to help guide policy-makers, and inspire Oregonians to take concrete steps toward improving the health of themselves, their families and their communities.

CHP — a collaboration of the Northwest Health Foundation, and the Oregon Department of Human Services — believes public health initiatives do not currently address key public health needs. Oregon is 43rd in the nation when it comes to investing in our public health programs. And our public policies and discussion often focus too much on healthcare costs instead of what it takes to have healthy people. That is why we need to hear from you.

As a health advocate, Portland resident and a father, I wish for an environment where it's easier for people to make choices that promote a safe and healthy lifestyle; where healthy choices are not only possible but encouraged. My family and I care deeply about health and safety in our local com-

munity and take small steps every day to address these issues such as riding bikes for transportation. But, more than that, we support activities that help make it easier for other families to bike, and we participate in discussions that address the well-being of our entire community, not just our own. I'd like to encourage your family, neighbors and friends to do the same. Together, we'll see the health of our families and communities improve.

To share feedback, participate in surveys, read about grant opportunities for your neighborhood organizations, get more information on how to become involved or to help mobilize your community and ensure your community's voice will be heard, please go to www.CommunityHealthPriorities.org.

David is a program officer at the Northwest Health Foundation, a non-profit organization that seeks to improve the health of communities in Oregon and southwest Washington.



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