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Whatcom County Health Department Releases Community Health Assessment

BELLINGHAM, WA — From disease rates to graduation rates, the 2018 *Whatcom County Community Health Assessment*, released today by the Whatcom County Health Department, provides a comprehensive look at the state of the county's health. It measures health and well-being across a range of indicators that answer two big questions: "How healthy are we?" and "What is our community's ability to respond to our most pressing public health concerns?"

Overall, Whatcom County continues to be a community that's generally healthy. But the good health we're known for isn't shared equally by everyone. One of the key findings of the *Community Health Assessment (CHA)* is that unfair differences in health and well-being persist. Income, race and ethnicity, and gender are factors that contribute to varying outcomes. "We should all have the same opportunity to make healthy choices and live a long and healthy life, but that's just not the case for everybody in our community," says Regina Delahunt, Health Department Director. "We can do more to change that by creating the conditions in Whatcom County that promote health for all of our fellow community members."

Being healthy isn't just about outcomes like how long we live, or which health conditions we do or do not have. Those are important indicators of health, but they don't tell the whole story. In fact, 40% of health is determined by factors well outside of the doctor's office, things like jobs, housing, finances, and having networks of caring people in our lives. The CHA includes data about those and other underlying factors that influence health: the physical environment we live in, our personal health behaviors, and access to quality health care. It also includes indicators of health outcomes, such as leading causes of death, life expectancy, and rates of illness.

Additional key findings highlight mixed trends in personal health behaviors. Though rates of drug, alcohol, and cigarette use among teens are down over previous years, rates of sexually-transmitted diseases have increased, and the highest rates are found among young people. There have been no improvements in rates of physical activity or obesity. And unsurprisingly, opioid abuse and misuse continues to be an area of concern.

Data on depression and suicide indicate an increase in poor mental health for both youth and adults. Information gathered from community members also reflected a need for better access to mental health care.

The 2018 *Community Health Assessment* forms the basis for a community process to improve Whatcom County's health through focused, collaborative actions. The health department is also preparing a series of Community Descriptions, shorter assessments that examine how health varies by geographic regions within Whatcom County, to be released in the fall. The public will have a chance to discuss the data further and share in selecting a small number of health priorities to focus on in 2019.

To learn more about the 2018 *Community Health Assessment* and to download a copy, visit <https://whatcomcounty.us/2018CHA>.

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