

## **AUBURN, WA**

**Mayor Nancy Backus**

# **The Blue Ribbon Committee for Auburn – The Healthiest City in Washington – 2020**

Beginning in 2015, the City of Auburn undertook an initiative to improve community health that was prompted by a 2015-2016 King County Community Health Needs Assessment that found that Auburn was one of the most negatively impacted cities in King County for health, housing and economic opportunity. To address the assessment's findings, Mayor Nancy Backus formed a large, diverse committee with the goal of transforming Auburn into the "Healthiest City in Washington" by 2020. This 48-member Blue Ribbon Committee of volunteers included the City's clinical partner, MultiCare Health System, and seven major stakeholders: Auburn School District, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, Green River College, Valley Cities Behavioral Health, Auburn Valley YMCA, HealthPoint, and Seattle-King County Public Health – all on record with their commitments to support this effort.

The committee's vision is that the health and well-being of all in Auburn will be optimized through education, participation, and innovation. Specific goals are to:

- Promote health for all in the community;
- Achieve commitment at the local level – individual support and key successful partnerships;
- Create a vision that is inclusive, defines the effort to be made in simple terms, and motivates people to work together toward its realization;
- Achieve sustainability with community commitment for the long term, with "ongoing resolve to work together, advance, and maintain effective, caring and respectful strategies that continuously improve health and quality of life for all;
- Monitor, measure, and maintain data analytics and outcomes to the extent possible; and
- Update the leaders regularly on work being done and accomplishments.

Nine major health issues were identified in Auburn; four were chosen by the committee as the focus for its initial planning for improvement:

### **Mental/Behavioral Health**

A one-hour program, R.E.A.D.Y. (Real Emergency Aid Depends on You), was developed to provide information on common mental/behavioral health issues and basic skills to use in emergent situations, such as the gap in time until emergency personnel respond to a 911 call, and what to expect when they arrive. The committee calls it the "CPR of Mental Crises." The goal now is to present R.E.A.D.Y.<sup>SM</sup> to as many people as possible, in Auburn and beyond. The impact of the committee was acknowledged in a call from a nearby city that had lost three teens to suicide. The difficulty they faced in dealing with their loss was coupled with a desire to help the committee spread the word and offer hope to others. The committee will soon complete a TEEN R.E.A.D.Y. program and will share it with this city for the benefit of the students in the schools in their area.

### **Healthy Weight for Adults and Children**

Approximately 35 percent of the school children in Auburn are overweight or obese. The committee is working with the schools and with Auburn restaurants in a joint effort to provide healthier foods that kids want to eat.

## **Maternal Child Health**

Vaccinations – An annual goal of the committee is to work with Auburn School District nurses to provide free vaccinations to all students – as close to 100 percent of them as possible. To date, more than 1,500 students have been vaccinated.

“First Food” – The committee worked with the Muckleshoot Tribe to help them develop a customized course in breast feeding. “Muckleshoot First Food – A Breastfeeding Campaign” trains young moms to become peer educators who will teach the women of their tribe the importance of “first food.” To date, 16 students have graduated and funds are being sought to bring the program to more of the tribe and to other tribes in the area.

## **Multicultural Health Equity**

Latino Community Group – During its development of programs to improve health, the numerous health inequities faced by Auburn’s diverse population became strikingly apparent to the committee. Wanting to hear more about this directly, the committee scheduled its first meeting with a group of Latino parents at an elementary school with a significant Latino student population. Through three years of connecting and building trust, this group has grown steadily, and the committee has delivered information and connection opportunities on: neighborhood safety, youth mental health, basic disaster preparedness, Internet safety, first aid and CPR, and English language classes. In their evaluations, parents have reported how much they have grown and how, for the first time, they feel part of the community.

Marshallese Community Group – The State of Washington is home to the third largest number of people from the Marshall Islands in the U.S., and Auburn has one of the largest populations of Marshallese in the State. Recognizing this, and learning about the tragic history of the Marshallese people, the committee set out to build trust and health equity in that community. The focus of the first meeting on this, in December 2017, was on how to engage more Marshallese people. That meeting was followed by nearly a year of developing relationships and discussing the community’s health needs, beginning with health insurance.

Following the State’s passage this year of a new healthcare bill, the committee’s first Marshallese event was centered around enrollment for the new insurance, along with free health screenings and services. With the help of new Marshallese leaders who are committed to the committee’s work, the event was judged to be a success, with more than 200 people in attendance. Relationships were strengthened and, two months later, the committee helped the group hold a “Showcase of Culture, Arts, and Handicrafts,” which was attended by more than 400 people. The main speakers were the Minister of Education and Internal Affairs from the Marshall Islands and Auburn’s Mayor Backus. A survey of the group identified their top four health needs: diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, and kidney disease.

The most recent event in the community, in April, was held in the wake of a tragedy: one of their 18-year-old boys, who was a Marshallese gang member, was shot and killed in a gang-related crime in a nearby city. This event for parents and relatives was requested after a meeting with the Chief of Police. Over two hours, in an informal setting, many questions were answered and plans began to take shape for more community activities, stronger parental guidance, and the possibility of a canoe carving class for young boys who would work with the Marshallese Master Carver and carvers from the Muckleshoot Tribe.

Auburn officials cite a quote that they believe sums up the work of their Blue Ribbon Committee: “A healthy community is where people come together to make their community better for themselves, their family, their

friends and neighbors and others. A healthy community creates ongoing dialogue, generates leadership opportunities for all, embraces diversity, connects people and resources, fosters a sense of community, and shapes its future.”

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