

St. Joseph County Department of Health: Strategic Plan 2024-2028

Vision: Optimal health for a thriving St. Joseph County.

Mission: To promote health and wellness with compassion and integrity through partnerships, education, protection, and advocacy for all who reside in and visit St. Joseph County.

Summary

The purpose of this strategic plan is to outline the Health Department's goals, plans, and initiatives for creating a healthier St. Joseph County. The St. Joseph County Department of Health (SJCDoH) is committed to meeting and exceeding the delivery of our core public health services and will have an increased focus on evidence-based programming and data collection to drive implementation of future health initiatives. In the next four years, the SJCDoH will also implement novel measures to improve infant-maternal child health, reduce the impact of obesity-related chronic conditions, and address mental health needs in our community. The SJCDoH is invested in strengthening its presence in the community and remaining a neutral space for reliable, evidence-based information that promotes, protects, and secures healthy living for all those that reside and visit St. Joseph County.

Introduction

The current life expectancy of a resident of St. Joseph County is 76.2 years, compared to Indiana's average life expectancy of 76.5 years.¹ The top three leading causes of death in St. Joseph County are lung cancer, heart disease and accidents.² Obesity associated chronic conditions, including heart disease and diabetes mellites, are increasing in our community and are coupled with a rise in childhood obesity. Further, St. Joseph County is experiencing an increase in substance abuse and mental health challenges following the COVID pandemic.³ In addition, maternal and child health continue to be poor in our community due to a significant need for early prenatal care and improved management of high-risk pregnancies. According to the Indiana Department of Health (IDOH), St. Joseph County is ranked 65th out of 92 counties in Indiana for infant mortality. The Fetal Infant Mortality Review (FIMR) from 2017-2021 reported that 56.3% of infant deaths had a good chance of prevention, providing us with insights on methods to improve infant health. Finally, lead poisoning continues to be an area of active work for the SJCDoH, as approximately 70% of homes built before 1978 contain lead paint.⁴ This Strategic Plan summarizes the goals, plans, and initiatives that the SJCDoH plans to undertake in the next four years in order to improve the health of all those that reside in and visit St. Joseph County.

¹ Indiana Department of Health Scorecard 2023

² Burden of Disease Report, St. Joseph County, Indiana 2020

³ SAMHSA, Disaster Technical Assistance Center Supplemental Research Bulletin, A preliminary look at mental health and substance use- related effects of Covid-19 pandemic, May 2021.

⁴ SJCDoH internal data calculations, based on census data from 2022.

The Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan will address increasing community education, developing community partnerships, strengthening the structure of the SJCDoH, improving the public's experience, developing impactful and evidence-based programming, and maintaining SJCDoH services and programming.

Increasing Community Education

Objective: To establish the SJCDoH as a reliable source for public health information in St. Joseph County.

Rationale: Accurate health information is key to giving people the necessary tools to make choices that improve their health outcomes.

Plan: A specialized Health Promotion Specialist (HPS) will collaborate with community partners and the Community Health Workers (CHWs) to deliver practical health education.

- The HPS will host community-tailored conferences, events, and one-on-one sessions with community members to promote best practices and address health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and cancer prevention.
- The SJCDoH will partner with community experts to create, deliver, and participate in health promotion programming.
- The SJCDoH will ensure our website has up-to-date resources on health information and referrals to local groups and programs in our community, where appropriate.

Developing Community Partnerships

Objective: To collaborate with key stakeholders in evaluating, monitoring, and delivering public health related services.

Rationale: Embracing partnership and collaboration with key community stakeholders can provide a variety of avenues to increase understanding of health in our community. It also provides an opportunity for the SJCDoH to be a source of reliable information and support for local partners with similar goals to improve the health of our community.

Plan:

- Use Health First Indiana (HFI) grant opportunities to collaborate on health initiatives, improve the delivery of health care services, and strengthen SJCDoH relationships with community partners.
- Create a Director of Community Partnership and Development position within the SJCDoH to increase collaboration with community partners and ensure that HFI grant recipients are well-positioned to execute their programming and report the results.
- Create an action group that convenes with key stakeholders in different sectors that influence public health with the mission to collaborate, share information on the state of health in the

county, and develop complementary programming and interventions to positively impact public health.

- Create a collaborative Community Health Needs Assessment for St. Joseph County.
- Collaborate with educational partners and formalize internship and fellowship opportunities within the SJCDoH to facilitate an understanding about public health and its impact on our community. In addition, to increase general education to community learners, the SHCDoH will also create a public facing online portal for students to view educational opportunities within the SJCDoH.
- Engage volunteers in the community to augment the work of the SJCDoH and increase community participation. The SJCDoH will create a formal volunteer program that will engage individuals with various experiences and match them with projects and opportunities within the SJCDoH to cultivate a community of service in the sphere of public health.

Strengthening the Structure of the SJCDoH

Objective: To review the structure of the SJCDoH and identify opportunities for growth and streamlining of services.

Rationale: Coupling the structure of the SJCDoH with its mission, goals, and objectives will ensure increased accountability, transparency, and productivity in the department.

Plan:

- Review and adjust the current organizational chart to reflect the goals of the department and Health First Indiana funding opportunities.
- Review staff workspace allocation to improve communication and workflow efficiencies.
- Improve Employee Recruitment and Retention.
 - o Update the SJCDoH personnel policy, last updated in 2000.
 - o Implement an Anniversary Recognition initiative.

Improving the Public's Experience

Objective: Use technology to improve the department's public interface. This will include updating the website and portals to make it easier for the public to access SJCDoH services and information.

Rationale: Increased accessibility will improve the use of services offered by SJCDoH, enhance the public experience, and increase our ability to effectively communicate with the public.

Plan:

- Update the SJCDoH website to make it more user friendly and easier to navigate.
- Use CivicGov to make it easier for the public to obtain licenses and permits.
- Hire a communication specialist to support website management, improve communication strategies, increase the department's social media footprint, and develop methods for public engagement.
- Consider creating an SJCDoH app that allows users to receive push notifications for health advisories and more easily access the services offered by the department.

- Create a public-facing dashboard of public health information that is shared in an easy-to-view and understandable manner.
- Implement the Force 5 contract to advertise the Community Health Worker program and to increase connection to resources.

Developing Impactful and Evidence-Based Programming

Objective: To develop programming within the SJCDoH that supports the public health needs of the community, is evidence-based, and has measurable outcomes.

Rationale: Collection of baseline data and use of evidence-based programming will enable the SJCDoH to monitor implementation, measure the impact of health interventions, and ensure resources are spent appropriately.

Plan:

- Use data that is currently available to act on public health issues that have been demonstrated to be areas of need in our community. Such areas include, but are not limited to, maternal and child health, chronic conditions, radon toxicity, lead poisoning, and mental health.
- Programs will be evidence based and data driven. SJCDoH will collect and monitor data to measure success and identify opportunities for improvement throughout the process.
- When appropriate, data on projects will be published for our community to review. This will promote engagement, transparency, and hopefully foster discussion on programming and outcomes that can be used by others or help tailor future projects.
- To avoid duplication of services, the SJCDoH aims to partner with established community programs that are already achieving public health goals. The SJCDoH will consider programming to address any gaps in services offered, in order to ensure that everyone is able to access important health initiatives within the county.

Maintaining SJCDoH Services and Programming

Objective: SJCDoH will use available funding and resources, including Health First Indiana funding, to develop and strengthen programming that improves public health.

Rationale: By further investing in services already provided by the SJCDoH, we can maximize our capacity to meet increased community demand, as well as to develop public health-focused programming, in order to better serve the health and wellness of all residents of and visitors to St. Joseph County.

Plan:

- Environmental Health Unit
 - Develop a robust vector program to protect from vector borne diseases. In particular, we are noticing higher rates of mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus, that are presenting earlier in the summer, spanning a longer season, and covering a larger area.
 - Provide 1.5 FTE to allow for a dedicated team to provide robust surveillance and earlier mitigation of mosquitoes.

- Increase tick surveillance.
 - Develop educational programming on mosquitoes and ticks.
 - Offer Lead Renovation, Repair, and Painting (RRP) training for lead remediation.
 - Augment the SJCDoH's current lead initiatives by offering RRP classes to allow property owners, maintenance staff, and the public to receive RRP certification so they can safely handle lead remediation.
 - Provide radon surveillance and mitigation programming.
 - Radon is the primary cause of lung cancer in non-smokers.⁵ Radon levels are expected to be elevated in 1 out of 4 homes in St. Joseph County.⁶ Parts of western St. Joseph County, including New Carlisle, North Liberty, and Walkerton, are affected more and will require additional outreach to screen for elevated radon levels.
 - Use CHWs to deliver and record radon levels in homes, using home radon kits to track levels to collect data on the areas most affected. In addition, CHWs will provide education and increase awareness about radon in our community.
 - Coordinate with local governmental groups and community partners to help subsidize remediation and provide education on safe practices for residents with high levels of radon in their homes.
 - Improve the septic permitting process.
 - Hire an additional Environmental Health Specialist to assist with septic inspections.
 - Use CivicGov as a method to streamline the septic permitting process and increase transparency.
- Nursing Unit
- Immunization: According to Indiana Department of Health, St. Joseph County is ranked 87th out of 92 counties in terms of the number of children less than 3 years old completing recommended vaccine series at a rate of 48.8%.⁷ The SJCDoH will aim to ensure appropriate reporting in CHIRP and to increase educational awareness and access to vaccines.
 - Develop a method to ensure that immunizations completed by health professionals are inputted into CHIRP. Provide additional support where needed.
 - Increase access to immunization by participating in more local community events using our mobile clinic.
 - Use Health First Indiana grant funds to coordinate with community partners to identify unique ways to reach those individuals that need vaccinations by increasing access and education.

⁵ Environmental Protection Agency estimates. [Health Risk of Radon | US EPA](https://www.epa.gov/radon/health-risk-radon#head): <https://www.epa.gov/radon/health-risk-radon#head>

⁶ DOH internal Data, extracted from radon tests collected from 2003-2017 that had a Radon level at EPA Action Threshold of 4.0 pCi/L or higher.


- Hire a school health liaison to improve student health, including by assisting with education and support to increase access to immunization, and by facilitating new initiatives such as a mobile dental program for school aged kids aimed at improving oral health.
 - Increase capacity to complete communicable disease investigations and reduce our need for state support to manage the high volume of investigations.
 - The SJCDoH will hire an additional public health nurse and a Disease Investigation Specialist (DIS) to ensure that we can report and manage all communicable disease investigations and reduce the need for state support.
- Food/Pool Unit
 - Hire an additional FTE to support pool and food inspection.
 - Support an online portal for permits through CivicGov.
 - Stay up to date with the new 2024 food code to ensure appropriate communication and support to community food establishments regarding these changes.
 - Provide community education when requested to explain the safe process for food handling.
- Vital Records
 - Continue to work on processes to move into an electronic system with an easier community facing interface.
 - Update the binding of old books, to preserve the integrity of our vital records.
 - Add an additional FTE to accommodate changes in the state rules regarding obtaining birth certificates for those born in another county.
 - Create a referral program through CHWs to obtain free birth certificates for those who cannot afford them.
- Continue to foster and develop our multi-unit Lead Poisoning Program. This program currently includes members from our environmental health unit, CHWs, Disease Investigation Specialists (DIS), a Public Health Nurse (PHN), and the perinatal lead coordinator.
 - Share educational material and resources for lead poisoning.
 - Continue to promote and develop the Lead Free by 3 campaigns.
 - Work to prevent lead exposure to newborns by promoting early lead screening and testing of high-risk homes for pregnant women.
 - Increase outreach events, programs, community partnership and coordination with local health professionals to ensure appropriate lead screening.
 - Continue community collaboration with lead awareness and testing programs.
- Community Access Resource and Education (CARE) Unit
 - Develop educational programs and presentations that address hypertension, diabetes, nutrition, and cancer. These programs will be conducted at community sites and will be available by request through our website. We will use CHWs to further support health education promotion in our community.
 - Elder care and fall prevention.

- Recognizing the unique needs of our elderly population, a health promotion specialist will promote healthy behaviors tailored to that demographic. These topics will include, but are not limited to, fall risk reduction techniques; resource navigation to include hearing aids, vision testing, and hearing screening; general resources for the senior population; and fostering a sense of community and friendship to promote their overall health.
 - Mental Health
 - During the COVID pandemic and thereafter we as a community have begun to recognize the increased need for mental health support. The SJCDoH will continue to play a role in working with our community partners to improve mental health and the overall wellbeing of our community.
 - A health promotion specialist will be dedicated to mental health programming, coordination, data collection and assisting with addressing the stigma of mental health.
 - This role will promote healthy strategies for individuals to deal with stress, anxiety, and social factors that exacerbate mental health conditions.
 - The HPS will also have a unique focus on addressing mental health in pregnant and post-partum women.
 - Continue to lead substance use prevention initiatives, including naloxone distribution, training, and harm reduction efforts.
 - Trauma and Injury Reduction
 - Increase local car seat safety and injury programs for community members.
 - Increase services for seniors with a focus on fall risk reduction programs.
- Maternal and Child Health: St. Joseph County is currently ranked 65th in the state of Indiana for infant and child mortality. However, the FIMR review (2017-2021) stated that 56.3% of infant deaths had a good chance of prevention.
 - Hire a maternal and child health coordinator to develop and collaborate with community health professionals to address the issue of maternal and child health. There will be a focus on increasing access to early prenatal care and methods to support mothers during and after birth to ensure that both mother and baby have the resources necessary to be healthy and thrive.
 - Dedicate three CHWs to maternal infant health (MIH-CHWs) that will work exclusively on improving maternal and child health. The MIH-CHWs will be located at centers where women find out they are pregnant. These CHWs will provide insurance navigation support and connection to resources both within the SJCDoH and in the community that are specific to mothers and their partner's needs.
 - Use HFI funding to support innovative programs in our community that address maternal and child health.

- Convene community partners, stakeholders, and leaders on maternal and child health issues so we can move the needle on maternal and child health.
- Consider building a memorandum of understanding with health systems in which we use our CHWs to ensure women have appropriate insurance coverage. In return, the health systems would see patients for their prenatal care within 2 weeks of referral.

The above are a few of the programs we will be implementing to grow and strengthen the services the SJCDoH offers to the community. However, it is important to acknowledge all the work the SJCDoH already does in the areas of food and pool safety, environmental health, nursing, and vital records that continues to keep our community safe and healthy.

Respectfully submitted,



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St Joseph County Department of Health