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New “HealthyFresno” Group Forms to Tackle Chronic Disease

Chronic illness hits ‘crisis levels’ in Fresno County, study shows

Web site and toll-free number to provide expert health information

FRESNO, CALIF. (May 31, 2006) – Chronic diseases have reached crisis levels in Fresno County according to a new study. Responding to the crisis, America’s pharmaceutical companies and a broad coalition of local community leaders, health care providers, and employers today are launching HealthyFresno, a community-wide effort to improve health and help reduce the incidence of disease here in Fresno.

“If any community has the strength to turn these numbers around and get healthier, it’s Fresno,” said Mayor Alan Autry who is lending his support to the effort. “The HealthyFresno program gives us a blueprint for working together to become a healthier and more health literate community. I challenge every county resident to get involved.”

The HealthyFresno program brings together key health care players, community leaders, and local celebrities offering a health, wellness, and disease prevention campaign that encourages Fresno County residents to make better nutrition and fitness decisions and to identify health issues and risk factors at an early stage.

The study, led by Altarum Institute, an independent research company, looks at long-lasting illnesses, such as asthma, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and depression, and how they impact the greater Fresno community. According to the study, these diseases are the leading causes of death and disability in Fresno County and pose the top health threat to the Fresno community.

The study, released today at the Ted C. Wills Community Center, paints a sobering picture of health in the Fresno area:

- More than 300,000 people living in Fresno County suffer from at least one chronic disease.
- Every year, more than 3,500 Fresno County residents die because of chronic disease.
- About 80% of these deaths could be prevented by changes in behavior.
- These diseases cost the Fresno community approximately \$1.8 billion per year in health care bills, lost productivity, and related costs.

“It’s time to get in the game and fight back against chronic disease,” said HealthyFresno supporter and Parks and Recreation Director Randall Cooper. “The HealthyFresno program makes it easy for our community to beat disease and have a healthier, more active tomorrow.”

Helping residents understand what they can do for themselves to prevent chronic disease is the primary goal of HealthyFresno – and local health care providers are enthusiastic about the prospects for change.

“On a daily basis, I witness firsthand the enormous burden that chronic diseases have on this community,” said Dr. Jose Luis Bautista, who practices internal medicine in Fresno. “We must do all that we can to improve our chances of living longer and living healthier. HealthyFresno helps us learn about the diseases we are at risk for and the simple things we can do today to prevent these conditions from harming us tomorrow.”

Residents can join HealthyFresno for free at www.HealthyFresno.org or by calling toll free, 1-866-458-4937.

By signing up to participate in program, residents receive:

- A personal health assessment (available for free at www.HealthyFresno.org).
- A membership kit stocked with fun ideas for fitness, nutrition, and healthy living.
- Tools to help participants reach personal diet and exercise goals.
- Personalized reminders and physician-approved health tips.
- Valuable discounts from local vendors.
- Chances to win gifts and prizes to celebrate a new healthy lifestyle.
- The support of other community members who are trying to make big improvements in their lives.

“To help people make better health decisions, we must start at the local level and unite everyone who has a stake in the community’s health,” said Dr. Paul Antony, chief medical officer for Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), a group that represents America’s pharmaceutical companies. “Working with the partners in this campaign, we will help the people of Fresno understand that small changes can make big differences in an individual’s health and, with the right support and resources, in the health of an entire community.”

Dozens of prominent community leaders, employers, civic groups, and health care organizations have joined the HealthyFresno program. Among them: Congressman Jim Costa, Clovis Mayor Nathan Magsig, Fresno County Farm Bureau, the West Fresno Healthcare Coalition, Todos Unidos, LULAC, The Arthritis Foundation, the American Heart Association, and the Fresno Department of Parks and Recreation.

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