



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Cindy Barry
Supervisor, Community Relations
860.448.4882 x302
cbarry@ledgelighthd.org

August 17, 2009

A New Direction for a Healthier New London

NEW LONDON — Ledge Light Health District is among 10 local health departments in the United States selected by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to advance community leadership in the nation's efforts to prevent chronic disease. The ACHIEVE (Action Community for Health, Innovation and Environmental Change) Program will bring together local leaders and community members in the city of New London for the purpose of promoting policies, creating new systems and changing conditions in the community to improve nutrition, increase physical activity and reduce tobacco use.

"I think this is a highlight for the city of New London, a chance to really connect people with the health aspect of their lives," says Deb Gray, resident of New London and ACHIEVE member.

The District applied for the "Healthy Communities Program" funding on behalf of a number of community health organizations who are inviting participation from elected officials, health professionals, school representatives, business owners, health and human service professionals, city parks and recreation, planning and development departments, universities and New London residents.

The ACHIEVE New London Initiative, coordinated by Cindy Barry, Ledge Light Health District's community relations supervisor and Shirleyann Dunbar-Rose, past board president, has been gaining momentum, since its first meeting on June 25th. A "traveling team" recently represented the 25 member ACHIEVE Team, at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention sponsored Action Institute in Alexandria, Va., where proven community interventions were shared by communities across the nation, such as improving systems that promote bicycling to school and work, increasing community gardens and establishing food security systems, prohibiting smoking in public places, and restricting tobacco advertising.

"The conditions in which we live account for the greatest impact on our health," says Barry. "Strong action at the community level is critical to reversing chronic disease trends." In New London an estimated 25 percent of citizens report having three or more chronic diseases, 30 percent report having high blood pressure and 27 percent report

smoking, according to the 2007 New London County Health Needs Assessment. “There are a number of popular and effective health education and other prevention programs in New London; they must be complimented by policies that can be adopted by schools, organizations, businesses and city government that serve to protect the health of the residents they serve”.

The three year funding will allow the ACHIEVE New London Team to assess conditions that support a healthy community as well as those that may be contributing to growing rates of chronic disease. “We will be looking to establish policy and environmental changes that affect the greatest number of citizens, change that is sustainable, cost effective, and makes sense for New London,” says Barry.

A number of activities have been planned to help create a snapshot of New London. Three tours of New London have been scheduled, a walking tour of Bates Wood Park, a bike tour to gage the degree to which the City is “bike friendly,” and a bus tour of the city’s parks, schools, neighborhoods, and community gardens. An assessment tool developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention will be used to gather information from organizations, city planning and development departments, policy, businesses, schools and health care providers, focus groups and community surveys will be used to gather community input. “Although we are going to meet with as many people as possible, if there are groups meeting in New London that want to host a meeting to share idea and concerns we want to be there”, says Barry.

“I am very excited to see people come together, to go beyond programs to systematic changes, to go beyond organizations and into the community,” says Lisa Sullivan, director of the Front Porch Foundation, and ACHIEVE member. “There are so many great ideas, building on the momentum of what is already happening here in New London.”

For more information or to join the ACHIEVE Initiative contact Ledge Light Health District at 448-4482, ext. 302.

Ledge Light Health District provides professionally managed comprehensive public health services designed to improve the quality of life and health and safety of our residents. The District service area consists of East Lyme, Groton, Ledyard, New London and Waterford, with a service population of over 120,000.