

Group Ranks County's Biggest Health Issues

Members of the Kanawha Coalition for Community Health Improvement and community residents ranked obesity, lack of physical activity and drug abuse as the top three health problems in Kanawha County Tuesday.

The group released a report Tuesday morning on the health of Kanawha County. It showed fewer residents have an optimistic outlook for the future, more people are eating fast food and the majority of Kanawha County resident support tax increases on tobacco and alcohol.

The report, which is compiled every three years, also contains extensive information on drug use and general health of the area.

On Tuesday evening, the coalition held a meeting at the University of Charleston to official unveil its findings to the public and receive feedback. Those in attendance were asked to rank the most urgent health issues in Kanawha County.

When the results were tallied, obesity and nutrition came in as the biggest concern. It was followed by lack of physical activity and an increase in drug abuse.

Judy Crabtree, the executive director of the coalition, says the they will use the rankings as a way to focus their attention.

"Our coalition uses this as a way to prioritize what we're going to be working on over the next three years," Crabtree said.

Crabtree also said it allows health officials to better understand the public perception of health issues.

The coalition will recruit new members to join work groups over the next few years. Those groups will look at the problems ranked as the worst in the county.

"Bring everyone working on those issues around the same table so we can jointly plan and have a bigger impact on those issues," she said.

Crabtree says the data can also be used by health groups other than the coalition. The information will also help local organization acquire grant funding, she said.