

## FUTURE PLANNING

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*Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy.*

The Future of Public Health, Institute of Medicine, 1988

The work of the 1998 Regional Health Council is a critical first step in empowering the community to take responsibility for its public health. Significant community action remains necessary to improve the quality of life for Shelby County citizens. This is especially true in the areas of health care access for the uninsured and underinsured, the continued need for high quality data from which to make health policy decisions, and community support for health prevention programs, such as smoking cessation, obesity and good nutrition. However, as the work of the Council demonstrates, significant involvement with citizens in the community is essential to identify health issues and to build the capacity for community commitment to public health concerns. In fact, these very citizens are the assets that strengthen community health.

Building and maintaining the community's health care delivery system also requires community commitment. To be effective, citizens must have access to sufficient numbers of qualified health professionals and services and a health care system that supports private-public partnerships. Challenges that threaten the health care system in Shelby County include an inadequately funded TennCare system, high levels of uninsured households, lack of geographic access to needed health care services due to transportation barriers, and the growing financial struggles of the academic medical center in Memphis.

The SCHRC will continue to monitor these issues. In June, 2000, the Public Health Department learned that it had been granted the Healthy Start Initiative grant from the Department of Health and Human Services. SCHRC will play a major role in this initiative in an advisory capacity.

The Memphis and Shelby County Health Department remains committed to the Community Diagnosis process. If challenges to the County's public health are left unaddressed, the community faces diminished capacity in the future to improve public health and prevent unnecessary disease, death and decreased overall health status in the region.