



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 2, 2019**

## **NEW COALITION PROMOTES A HEALTHIER FAYETTE COUNTY**

**Uniontown, PA** – As Fayette County residents set their New Year’s resolutions, many are dedicating themselves to bettering their overall health.

In 2019, the Fayette Living Well Coalition is committed to helping residents achieve those “new year, new me” goals by improving and sustaining physical, social, economic, psychological and environmental health.

Formed as a subcommittee of the Fayette County Community Health Improvement Partnership, the Living Well Coalition is a planning group which reviews the county’s wellness state and works together toward the day when all its residents can “live well.”

The coalition comprises steering committee members Muriel Nuttall, Sandra Morris, Erica Usher, John Rapano, Melissa Miner, Jana Kyle, Sue Quinn, Mike Quinn and Jacqueline Core, as well as representatives of various wellness-driven county entities.

Members have been working for more than a year to shape the coalition’s countywide campaign, with technical assistance from the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The state’s Public Health 3.0 initiative has served as a guide for the new coalition through a regional health partnership.

“We recognize that our population’s health has a lot to do with how people live. Your ZIP code matters,” said Erica Usher, prevention supervisor for the Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission. “A single, working mother may not have time to go to the gym or focus on her health. She may not have the resources to keep fresh fruits and vegetables in the house, so our goal is to help these families figure out how they can balance that all out and make it more equitable.”

Each year, the New Jersey-based Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the country’s largest philanthropy focused solely on health, releases its community health rankings and “quality, long-term data” the coalition can use, Fayette Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Muriel Nuttall noted.

“We knew we needed to make changes, not just to get our ranking higher, but to build a healthier community physically, mentally and economically,” Nuttall said. “They focus on such things as worksite wellness, education, healthy homes and safety - so we have a very broad base of health data to work with when creating that culture of wellness.”

The coalition held its first Community Conversations event last summer at the Uniontown YMCA, which brought together local leaders and stakeholders. Its purpose was to collect additional data to create an action plan.

Usher said the group allowed county entities to combine the positive wellness initiatives they were already working on and generate some “really big picture thinking.”

“It was ultimately really purposeful, because they were able to rotate through topics and help us look for common themes that could be areas for improvement,” Usher continued. “It was everyone coming together, talking about a solution to build some collective impact.”

For more information on upcoming Community Conversations, contact the Fayette Chamber of Commerce at 724-437-4571.

As CEO of Chestnut Ridge Counseling Services, Mike Quinn is able to bring his behavioral and mental health expertise to the coalition’s table, and increase programming efforts for Fayette County residents.

Thanks to a growing partnership between Chestnut Ridge and the National Council for Behavioral Health, residents now have access to Youth Mental Health First Aid Training, a unique, 8-hour program now being offered free of charge.

The program is geared toward adults who work closely with youth and designed to familiarize them with what mental illness looks like and how to recognize the signs of a child struggling with a mental health crisis.

The next public training will be offered from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Jan. 31 at the Fayette County Behavioral Health Administration, 215 Jacob Murphy Ln., Uniontown. For more information, email [kreicher@usc.edu](mailto:kreicher@usc.edu) or [mquinn@crCSI.org](mailto:mquinn@crCSI.org).

Other youth-driven health initiatives will also be offered in 2019, thanks to Fayette County Communities that Care, a risk-focused approach that uses community organization and planning to reduce levels of youth problems and help adolescents thrive.

The process uses data to address youth problem behaviors. Local citizens and community leaders work together to identify the risk factors that increase the likelihood of problem behaviors developing, and then seek evidence-based programs and strategies that can shield children from these problems.

To get involved with the many Communities that Care programs strengthening residents’ overall health, check out the upcoming January meeting dates on [www.ctcfayette.org](http://www.ctcfayette.org).

Fayette County Communities that Care uses the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) to identify local risk and protective factors. The data is then used to implement a comprehensive plan to step ahead of problems with far-reaching and long-lasting solutions in the form of evidence-based programs.

After several years of implementing these strategies, the community reassesses its risk and protective factors to measure impact and identify new emerging priorities.

Nuttall said the Living Well Coalition also utilizes PAYS to help outline its goals and strategies.

She said the coalition has collected “mounds of data” and is currently analyzing it to finalize their action plan, with the ultimate goal of having Fayette County Commissioners “adopt and legitimize” it as part of the county’s overall comprehensive plan.

Commissioner Chairman Vince Vicites said he hopes the Living Well Coalition will educate and motivate county residents to improve their health and wellness.

“The health of our residents is very important,” Vicites said. “We need to focus on improving the health of all of our Fayette County residents so they can live a better quality of life.

Vicites said he is very interested in working closely with coalition members to improve county health rankings and create a healthier community. He encouraged residents to get involved because the coalition can point them in the right wellness direction.

“As a commissioner, I strive to improve our county on all fronts,” Vicites said. “In turn, we must help our residents improve on their health and wellness so they can enjoy long and prosperous lives.”

Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink urged residents to support the coalition’s efforts by taking control of their own health, drinking more water, eating healthy and exercising.

“This is yet another category where Fayette County ranks low, but shouldn’t,” she said. “To some extent, it is caused by our own doing. It’s your choice.”

Nuttall said the coalition has heard people complain about Fayette County long enough.

“We all want to be part of the solution,” Nuttall said. “It’s time to be part of the change.”

Sandra Morris, executive director of the Fayette County Association for the Blind, said she loves living in Fayette County and wants to improve it now so her children may later see the fruits of her labor.

“A lot of people don’t see this place the way I do, but we have a lot going for us - countless miles of trails to walk, beautiful parks,” she said. “There’s a lot of potential in our community but, as parents, we want our kids to grow up where there’s more than just potential.

“We’re trying to figure out how we can get there, how we can make a difference.”

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.FayetteCountyPA.org](http://www.FayetteCountyPA.org).

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*This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the 2016 Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.*

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