

Valley Voice: HARC data show reduction in childhood obesity

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As CEO of HARC (Health Assessment Resource Center) and personally, I focus on a positive attitude. When evaluating the results of our 2013 Health Needs Assessment, I first see the positive changes that have occurred between the 2007, 2010 and 2013. These three data points have paved the road to painting a picture of the changes in the health and social well-being of our Coachella Valley residents.

The rate of obesity for children has dropped from 53.4 percent in 2010 to 39.8 percent in 2013. Although not statistically significant, this does indicate that national and local efforts to reduce the rate of obesity for our children are having a positive impact.

Also, HARC data show that there are significantly more children 2 years of age and older who ate dinner together as a family every day in 2013 than in 2010. It has been documented that children who eat dinner at

home with their family are known to have a lower likelihood of being overweight or obese. Interestingly, the rate of obesity in adults has not changed between the HARC research years.

It would seem wise to create smart strategies at the national and local level to reduce obesity in adults to mirror the efforts afforded our children. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention ranks obesity, after tobacco use, as the second-leading cause of preventable death in the United States. It accounts for approximately 300,000 deaths.

For children with mental health problems, there was a significant increase in seeing a family doctor or pediatrician for treatment from 4 percent in 2010 to 12.3 percent in 2013. This is possibly due to greater acceptance of the fact that mental illness is a valid health problem for children, thus more and more children are being treated for mental health, a rise that is much faster than adults being treated for mental health. Another possibility is the efforts of the Coachella Valley Health Collaborative, which convened three mental health summits addressing the reduction of stigma and the improvement of care for those afflicted with mental health problems.

On the other side of the coin, we have changes that are disturbing. The number of adults diagnosed with cancer has increased from 9.6 percent in 2007 to 13.8 percent in 2013. Of those diagnosed with cancer the three most common types are skin, followed by prostate and breast. The incidence of breast, colorectal, and prostate cancer is expected to increase 75 percent by 2030 in developed countries. Even though highly developed countries, like the U.S., only have 15 percent of the world's population, they account for 40 percent of cancer cases worldwide in 2008. Breast cancer and prostate cancer seem to be increasing in the majority of highly developed countries.

Another concern in our valley is the mistreatment of our seniors. Coachella Valley seniors, when asked if they had been mistreated or neglected physically or mentally in the past year, the data show a significant increase from 1.7 percent in 2010 to 4 percent in 2013. When comparing elder abuse between 2007 and 2013, the rate of elder abuse was statistically similar. Nationally, about 10 percent of elders age 60 and over have experienced some type of abuse/potential neglect (excluding financial exploitation) in the past year. Many studies have found that the rates are increasing for both the amount reported and the amount experienced.

To find out more about the health needs and disparities facing our Coachella Valley residents go to HARC's website, harcdata.org to find the 2013 HARC Community Health Monitor Executive Report. At the end of April, HARC will release the updated online data base, HARCSearch that will include the 2013 data.

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