

**Annual Report Full Text Format  
Southcoast Hospitals Group  
363 Highland Ave.  
Fall River, MA 02720  
Serving the region of Southeastern Massachusetts  
Fiscal Year 2003**

**SECTION I**

**Community Benefits Mission Statement**

Southcoast Hospitals Group, including Charlton Memorial Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital and Tobey Hospital, are committed to serving the healthcare needs of the South Coast region.

[www.southcoast.org/mission](http://www.southcoast.org/mission)

In recognition of Southcoast's commitment to improving the health status of the communities we serve, the Board of Trustees of Southcoast Hospitals Group has established a Community Benefits Committee to assist in the process of:

- identifying the unmet health needs of the community by working in collaboration with the relevant community health networks established by the Department of Public Health and other community representatives and providers;
- prioritizing the identified health needs, utilizing criteria inclusive of the severity of the problem, the availability of alternative resources to address the issue, the benefit to be derived, and the potential of collaboration with others to address the need;
- identifying which needs can most effectively be met through the resources of Southcoast Hospitals Group, and its affiliated corporations, particularly the needs of the uninsured and the medically underserved needing enhanced access to care;
- providing educational resources to educate the community regarding health promotion and wellness. Educational initiatives shall incorporate recognition of the cultural aspects of accessing the healthcare system;
- recommending to the Southcoast Hospitals Group Board of Trustees the adoption of meaningful programs and services to address specifically unmet needs and to improve the health of the community.

The Southcoast Hospitals Group community benefit mission statement was approved and adopted by the Southcoast Hospitals Group Board of Trustees on Sept. 11, 1996.

**SECTION II**

**Internal Oversight and Management**

The Southcoast Community Benefits Program is under the overall direction of a trustee level Community Benefits Committee that meets regularly and authorizes and reviews activities and expenditures related to community benefits. This committee reports to the Southcoast Hospitals Group Board of Trustees.

Two advisory groups, comprised largely of community members along with some hospital staff, plan and carry out activities related to Southcoast's two major community benefits initiatives: cardiovascular health and youth risk behaviors.

Management responsibility for the community benefits program rests with Southcoast's Vice President for Hospital System Integration.

A number of Southcoast staff at all levels participates regularly in our two community advisory groups. There are also regular updates and presentations on community benefits activities to management staff through Management Operations Councils at all three hospital sites. Presentations on community benefit activities are also periodically made to all levels of employees at Employee Forum sessions held approximately six times a year at all three hospitals. Information is also presented through articles in our internal hospitals publication, "Coastlines" and in a community newsletter, "Your Health Matters."

### **SECTION III**

#### **Community Health Needs Assessment**

Southcoast Hospitals Group commissioned a comprehensive needs assessment of the South Coast region by a nationally known health care research firm, Professional Research Consultants, Inc. This firm has conducted similar studies throughout the country. The survey, completed in 1997, consisted of telephone interviews of over 2350 residents throughout the South Coast, focus groups with a variety of community representatives and a review of Department of Public Health and other data.

The survey examined health habits and risk factors including modifiable health risks, disease prevention habits and access to health care. The resulting report also incorporated regional health morbidity and mortality statistics from various sources such as the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and compared regional data to Healthy People 2000 goals.

The survey identified six key concerns in the South Coast region:

#### **1. Cardiovascular Disease**

The death rate for cardiovascular disease in the South Coast (152.1 per 100,000 deaths) was considerably higher than both the state and national averages and much higher than the Healthy People 2000 goal of 100 per 100,000. Our survey found that unhealthy lifestyle habits play a likely role in this. The survey found:

- 24.8 percent have high blood pressure
- 24.4 percent have high cholesterol levels
- 29.1 percent are overweight
- 28.8 percent had no leisure time/physical activity during the month studied
- 23.6 percent were current smokers

As with the cardiovascular disease death rate, many of these rates were higher than both state and national averages.

#### **2. Cancer deaths**

Although cancer death rates in our region were second only to heart disease, these rates were comparable to or even slightly lower than state and national averages. The survey also found that Southcoast residents take advantage of local cancer screening programs, such as mammography and prostate screenings, at a rate higher than both the state and national averages. These screenings are widely available at low and no cost, particularly to those without health insurance or who are underinsured.

#### **3. Mental Health**

South Coast residents reported problems with mental health issues at a rate slightly higher than the Massachusetts and national averages. This was particularly true of residents living at the poverty level. The population living below the poverty level (11.6 percent) was

considerably higher than the state average of 8.9 percent. Per capita income was below the state level and the regional unemployment rate was four percent higher.

#### **4. Family planning, prenatal care and child development services.**

The South Coast as region has a high rate of teen pregnancy (12.9 percent of all live births) as compared with the state rate (7.3 percent) and the national rate (10 percent.) There also was a higher rate of women not receiving prenatal care in the important first trimester; 14.6 percent verses 11 percent statewide. The infant mortality rate, at 6.4 percent, was also slightly higher than the state rate of 5.1 percent although it is lower than both the national rates and the Healthy People 2000 guidelines.

#### **5. Access to primary medical care**

Close to 10 percent of residents in the region reported lack of health insurance coverage, although the rate was slightly higher in the cities of Fall River and New Bedford. There are also fewer primary care physicians per population in our region. This was true for all primary care specialties, which include internal medicine, OB/GYN, Pediatrics and Family Practice.

#### **6. Violence**

The overall crime rate in the South Coast is higher than the state, particularly for crimes such as rape, aggravated assault and burglary. A higher percentage of South Coast residents report being the victim of violent crime within the five years prior to the survey.

Our survey results were presented to and analyzed by three community benefits advisory groups, which consisted of close to 100 representatives from throughout the region. The groups included representation from healthcare providers, social service providers, educators, the faith community, law enforcement, government officials and consumers. The groups decided to focus efforts on two areas: cardiovascular disease and youth risk behaviors. Members felt that youth risk behaviors encompassed several health priorities identified by the needs assessment, including teen pregnancy, violence, mental health issues and drug and alcohol abuse.

The health needs assessment also includes two sets of focus groups that were conducted to assimilate the opinions, culture and beliefs reflective of all segments of our community. General focus groups were held to present our survey results and obtain feedback from various segments of our communities in developing priorities.

Then targeted focus groups were held with representatives of the two identified priorities of cardiovascular disease and youth risk behaviors. Discussions were held with various stakeholders and “at-risk” populations including cardiac patients, caregivers, and youth groups, including groups of pregnant and parenting teens. Southcoast’s Community Benefits Task Forces used information obtained from focus groups to further define the priority health issues and help develop subsequent strategic and action plans.

A consultant from Premier Health Care, who had lead similar discussions and planning at hospitals throughout the United States, facilitated our strategic planning process.

## **SECTION IV**

### **Key Collaborations and Partnerships**

In addition to wide inclusion on our health advisory committees, Southcoast staff collaborates extensively with a number of community groups, addressing such issues as health access, cardiovascular health, and drug use among youth. In developing and implementing the Community Benefit Strategic Action Plan, Southcoast collaborated with healthcare providers, social service providers, educators, the faith community, law enforcement, government officials and consumers.

Groups include:

Greater New Bedford Health & Human Services Coalition (Greater New Bedford CHNA)

Greater New Bedford Health Access Committee

Domestic Violence Committee of the New Bedford Health and Human Services Coalition

Catholic Social Services

Partners for a Healthier Community (Greater Fall River CHNA)

Wareham Community Services Collaborative

Wareham School Health Advisory Council

Martha Briggs Educational Club

NAACP

New Bedford Historical Society

Westerly Associates

Women of the Village

United Way of Greater New Bedford

United Way of Greater Fall River

Regional Tobacco Control programs

PACE-Head Start

SER-Jobs for Progress, Inc.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health- Division of Prevention

Wareham Council on Aging

Fall River Council on Aging

Greater New Bedford Community Health Center

CVS Health Connection

Mended Hearts

University of Massachusetts Extension Program

Fall River Diabetes Association

American Heart Association

Health First Family Health Center, Fall River

Positive Attitude Against Chemical Addiction (covering Greater New Bedford and Wareham)

New Bedford Child and Family Services

Portuguese Youth Cultural Organization

CFC Family Planning Organization

Greater Fall River Family Services Association

Greater New Bedford Women's Center

Project IMPACT (Greater New Bedford and Wareham)

Massachusetts Prevention Center

Greater New Bedford YMCA

YWCA of Southeastern Massachusetts

Greater New Bedford Youth on the Move

Greater New Bedford Prevention Partnership

## **SECTION V**

### **Community Benefits Plan**

Southcoast's Community Benefits Strategic Action Plan, first formulated in 1998 as a result of our extensive needs assessment phase (see section III), focuses on three regional priority health issues.

These include:

- Reduction of the high rate of cardiovascular disease in our region.
- Reduction in the incidence of youth risk behaviors such as teen violence and drug abuse.
- Access to health care.

Our initiatives focus on both the general Southcoast population and specific populations such as ethnic and other minorities and low income residents in our region, under, or uninsured, those without access to care, those at risk for heart disease and "at risk" youth.

A key strategic vision in all of our action plans is to collaborate and whenever possible, build upon and strengthen existing community resources that are addressing these problems, rather than create parallel new programs. We have been able to successfully accomplish this in all areas.

### **GOALS AND ACTION PLANS**

#### **Access To Health Care**

Southcoast devotes considerable resources to improving access to primary health care in our region, providing outreach services to both educate residents on the availability of no and low-cost health insurance programs, and whenever possible, help families enroll in these programs. [www.southcoast.org/free](http://www.southcoast.org/free)

Another key initiative in improving health care access is use of our Southcoast Mobile Health Van, which travels on almost a daily basis throughout the region bringing health screenings, education and other services to residents who do not have ready access to health care.

[www.southcoast.org/services/mobile](http://www.southcoast.org/services/mobile)

The van staff is trained in assisting people to access regular primary health care, through counseling about various health insurance programs and low and no-cost health services. Whenever possible, van staff follow-up with patients, to determine if they have been able to access other needed health services.

In addition to our outreach efforts, we actively participate in regional health access committees, including the MediCall program in Greater Fall River and the Health Access Committee of the Greater New Bedford Health and Human Services Coalition. As part of the second committee, we provided extensive support for an existing outreach program in the New Bedford public schools and began a program in the Wareham schools that was modeled on New Bedford's successful program. As a result of these two programs, over 200 residents in New Bedford and Wareham were enrolled in Mass Health, the Children's Medical Security Plan and other related health insurance programs. (For a detailed description of current activities and future goals, see Section VI, Access to Health Care)

#### **Cardiac Prevention Program**

Southcoast's Cardiac Prevention Program served over 1400 individuals during 2003 in promoting its goals for primary and secondary prevention of heart disease. This program

provides individualized screening for risk factors, which includes a questionnaire and cholesterol screening. The information is entered into a database, and tracking follow up is conducted by a designated nurse, dietitian, and pharmacist. The prevention efforts focus on promoting education, lifestyle changes and risk factor modification. These efforts were coordinated in a number of different ways, working with the Southcoast Mobile Health Van, local churches, businesses and other organizations and outreach efforts with local schools. Efforts are made to target specific underserved and underinsured areas in the communities served by Southcoast.

### **Youth Risk Behaviors**

The strategic vision of our Youth Risk Behaviors Committee has been to catalogue services and attempt to increase collaboration among the wide range of regional youth services providers. We have wide representation on this committee on a monthly basis, including representatives from school districts, law enforcement, human services providers and very often, teens themselves.

The committee completed a survey of over 1000 local teens in 1999 to determine opportunities for increasing communication about issues that concern teens. As a result, the committee sponsored a regional Youth Summit, with over 150 teens, at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, in 2000. Teens again had the opportunity at the summit to give their visions about issues that concern them most.

All of this resulted in development of a regional, free information teen phone line, which serves the entire South Coast region. This effort is a true collaboration of regional agencies, with Southcoast building upon the efforts of two existing teen information lines that served just one of our communities. (See Section VI, Youth Risk Behaviors) It is a good example of our strategic vision to enhance and expand existing local services whenever possible.

## **SECTION VI**

### **Progress Report: Activity During Reporting Year**

#### **A. Major Programs and Initiatives**

##### **Access To Health Care**

Access to healthcare, as documented by the Community Needs Assessment, is a concern in the region. Southcoast has a long-standing commitment to improving the access through services such as free care and insurance eligibility outreach, the Medical Mobile Van, support to the local Community Health Centers and contributions to the MediCall program.

##### **Free Care and Insurance Eligibility Outreach**

Many health insurance programs in Massachusetts were curtailed by budget cuts during 2003, resulting in loss of health insurance for many local families. Some of these programs were eventually restored, and families were often confused about re-enrollment procedures. Our Patient Financial Services Department was instrumental in assisting local families through these difficulties.

The Patient Financial Services Department efforts resulted in the completion of 7238 Free Care Applications and 1492 MassHealth Applications. In addition, educational efforts with seniors took place regarding the open enrollment and tier coverage changes in the Prescription Advantage Program. Department staff filed 467 applications on individuals

losing their MassHealth Basic coverage. In an effort to continue to support community-based outreach efforts, additional initiatives were made specifically by a part-time outreach worker. Activities included:

- participation in the annual Head Start and Family Resource Informational Fair
- provided inservice education to address individuals at risk for losing their MassHealth Basic coverage
- Conducted outreach as part of a nation-wide “Cover the Uninsured Week.” Served 120 individuals at our three hospital sites.
- Participated in an outreach health fair at Wal-Mart
- Discussed changes in health insurance programs on various local radio programs and in other media outlets.

Plans for the upcoming year include a multimedia outreach program to area schoolchildren and their families, offering information and assistance in accessing low or no cost health insurance. This initiative is in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of New Bedford.

### **Medical Mobile Van**

The Southcoast Mobile Van served over 4,168 residents in Southeastern Massachusetts in 2003. [www.southcoast.org/services/mobile](http://www.southcoast.org/services/mobile)

In existence since 1993, the purpose of the van is to provide free health screenings, education and some clinical services to a broad –based population, with the goal of improving the health status of residents – particularly those without access to regular ongoing health care. The intent of this service is to break down barriers to health care.

The Van is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and provided free health screenings and education in a number of highly visible and accessible sites though the region offering services including blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol, colorectal and vision screening, pregnancy testing and extensive health education. Tetanus Diphtheria (TD), Pneumococcal Vaccine and Flu vaccine is also offered.

The Van serves an ethnically diverse population including Portuguese, Brazilian, Hispanic and Cambodian immigrants. Van staff also works closely with cultural organizations, churches and other community groups such as soup kitchens, to conduct outreach to diverse populations in order to develop culturally sensitive programs.

Other initiatives include the ESL Program (English as a second language) in New Bedford and Taunton, which serves a diverse group of immigrants, a population with significant risk factors for a variety of diseases as well as educational, cultural and other barriers that limit access to routine primary health care.

Another such initiative includes collaboration with the Adult Learning Programs and the Immigrants Assistance Center in New Bedford. Van staff has also worked in collaboration with the YWCA Women’s Health Program and the local YMCA of New Bedford and Middleboro.

In Fall River, the Mobile Van works in conjunction with the Cambodian Center, PYCO (Portuguese Youth Center Organization), Bristol Elder Services, and the local colleges. The van also works closely with Catholic Social Services on outreach efforts.

During the past year the Van also worked with the Fall River, New Bedford, and Wareham Business Association to target business communities in the South Coast.

The Mobile Van offers a Teen Program at several high schools in the South Coast region, providing adolescents with a range of health screenings and health information. Local family planning agencies provide counseling on STD and pregnancy prevention. This information and education to teens has resulted in improved follow up rates and reduced rates of repeat pregnancy tests. Van staff work with teachers to reach students with health educational material and health screenings. The van currently visits six area high schools: Diman Vocational High School in Fall River, Somerset High School, Westport High School, Old Colony High School in Rochester, Wareham High School, and Apponoquet High School in Lakeville.

In addition to outreach, the van continues to promote referral and follow up for regular primary health care services by networking with other service providers and disseminating information to patients. Staff also helps patients negotiate referrals and insurance applications. Patient satisfaction survey results indicated that this health information provided was useful and helpful.

The Southcoast-sponsored Community Health Needs Assessment, as well as the recently released Massachusetts Department of Public Health Behavioral Risk Factors Survey data show area rates at or better than the state average for cholesterol testing and blood pressure screening. The Mobile Van's outreach services have contributed to these positive-screening rates. All services are free of charge and fully supported by Southcoast Hospitals Group.

### **MediCall Program**

Southcoast continues to provide support to the MediCall program. MediCall's primary focus and unique mission is to link individuals who are unable to pay for health care with physicians in the community who are willing to provide free care for our underserved population. The MediCall Program continues to provide medical access to the underserved population in greater Fall River who are unable to arrange a health care appointment due to reasons such as lack of health insurance, financial hardship, language barrier, transportation difficulty or difficulty in making appointments. Staff evaluates patients based on financial eligibility criteria and coordinates referrals to over 175 local physicians who have volunteered to accept free care patients in their offices. MediCall referred 250 patients to primary care physicians' offices. In addition, outreach efforts were provided to 2352 individuals within our community and 662 individuals were approved for MassHealth with the assistance of the MediCall staff.

### **Interpreter Services**

Southcoast Hospitals Group offers comprehensive interpreting services for a wide range of populations including Portuguese, Hispanic, Cambodian and Cape Verdean patients. Interpreters assist with verbal interpretations for patients and their families who receive inpatient and outpatient care. The interpreters also provide community outreach and education to Southcoast staff on cultural competency.

In 2003, Southcoast interpreters provided 9419 encounters, which is a 25 % increase from the previous year. This translates into 5748 hours of interpreting services, which, a 19 % increase from 2002.

The predominant language encounters include:

- 4325 encounters, or 2664 hours of services for Portuguese-speaking patients;
- 4320 encounters, or 2262 hours with Spanish-speaking patients;
- 394 encounters, or 463 hours of interpretation with Cambodian patients who speak the Khmer language;
- 158 encounters, or 82 hours with patients who speak Cape Verde Creole.

Southcoast expended in excess of \$292,953 in interpreter services in 2003, including \$593 for a “language line” telephone service, which is operated by ATT.

### **Cambodian Outreach/Interpreter**

The Cambodian Outreach position was vacant from June 2002 until April of 2003. Despite the lapse due to the vacancy, Interpreter Services provided 394 encounters equivalent to 463 hours of interpreting, translating and outreach services to the Cambodian community.

Outreach includes participation in efforts to provide health services to the Cambodian population through the Southcoast Mobile Health Van. The Cambodian Outreach Worker is also involved in the Cambodian Mental Health Coalition and the Fall River Domestic Violence Coalition representing Southcoast Hospitals Group in efforts to identify and resolve gaps in service and education in the areas of mental health, and violence issues in the Cambodian community.

### **Community Health Center**

Southcoast provides financial support to the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center. The Greater New Bedford Community Health Center (GNBCHC) provides comprehensive primary medical care services, focused on the medically underserved. The Center’s primary service area has been determined by the United States Public Health Service to be “medically underserved” and represents high ethnic concentrations of Hispanic, Black, Portuguese and Cape Verde populations. This area also has high rates of unemployment and poverty. The Center sees over 66000 visits, representing 18000 medical patients. In CY2002, the Center opened a much-needed dental service, which continues to grow. With the economic downturn, the need for this Community Health Center has never been greater.

### **Cardiovascular Health**

#### ***Change of Heart***

Given the prevalence of risk factors for cardiovascular disease and the Southcoast region’s death rate from heart disease, which exceeds state and national norms, Southcoast continues a campaign to prevent heart disease and encourage early treatment of existing heart disease.

The ***Cardiovascular Health Task Force*** (CVHTF) was formed in response to the Community Benefit Strategic Action Plan. This task force identified three objectives: a resource guide focusing on prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease, a publicity campaign to promote a heart healthy lifestyle and advocacy of heart health. The CVHTF created ***Change of Heart***, a partnership among the Hospital, local health and human service providers, the American Heart Association, local participating businesses and Mended Hearts

(a support group for heart attack survivors). *Change of Heart* promotes heart healthy lifestyles, and provides specific resources and strategies to reduce cardiac risk factors through two program components. [www.southcoast.org/changeofheart](http://www.southcoast.org/changeofheart)

*Start with One Step* is a resource guide for a healthier heart. *Start with One Step* identifies five key areas that can impact heart health – smoking, exercise, diet, stress and family risk factors – and shows consumers how to target these risk factors by making small lifestyle changes one step at a time. The guide was developed by the CVHTF based on models of adult learning theory and change behavior. The companion component, the **HealthPass** Program, has been replaced by a more comprehensive research-based risk factor analysis tool described in the next section.

The *Change of Heart* campaign was launched in February, 2000 during Heart Month. U.S. Congressman Barney Frank and Massachusetts Department of Public Health Commissioner Howard Koh spoke at the kick off event, praising the program and Southcoast's response to the high incidence of cardiac morbidity and mortality in our region.

Program material has been translated into Spanish and Portuguese and is available on the Medical Mobile Van. *Change of Heart* information is distributed at health fairs and other locations around the region including the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, HealthFirst Family Care Center in Fall River, PACE-Head Start, Stop & Shop, Visiting Nurse Association and at various Southcoast Hospital sites and other providers across the region. Southcoast sponsors a toll-free *Change of Heart* telephone line for interested community members to call and learn more about the program or request materials to be sent to them. The *Change of Heart* website [www.southcoast.org/changeofheart](http://www.southcoast.org/changeofheart) offers program material online along with links to regional and national resources for heart disease and cardiovascular health education.

### **Cardiac Prevention Program**

In 2002, Southcoast Hospitals Group undertook a Cardiac Prevention Program for primary and secondary prevention of heart disease. The program, which served over 1400 individuals in 2003, is designed to coordinate approaches to reducing the health and economic burden of cardiovascular disease, which is a large health problem on the South Coast of Massachusetts.

The primary prevention process provides individualized screening for risk factors, including completion of a nationally recognized questionnaire and administration of several free tests such as cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure screenings. The questionnaire is designed to gauge various risk factors for heart disease; such as family history, nutritional habits and lifestyle habits such as lack of regular exercise. The questionnaire also provides the individual's predicted future cardiac risk based on Framingham Heart Study factors. There is also an educational component, as participants receive the results of their questionnaire and tests, along with suggestions and individual education on how to develop healthier lifestyle habits. This component is conducted by a team that includes a designated nurse, dietitian and pharmacist. The target population includes the medically underserved, minorities, adolescents and secondary prevention for cardiac patients.

Test and questionnaire results for each participant are entered into a database, and participants are tracked six months after their initial testing. This year, the program conducted over 1400 interviews and tests in the communities of Greater Fall River and New Bedford. Participants were reached through churches (including the Khmer Buddhist Temple

and Santo Christo Church); the Immigrant's Assistance Center; elderly and low income housing; industries such as Riverside Manufacturing, Alberox Manufacturing, and Duro Finishing; health fairs and other venues with an emphasis on reaching those who may be underserved due to economic or cultural barriers.

Staff also traveled to an area high school, Durfee High School in Fall River, where they enrolled over 320 students in the program. Many of these students were not at all familiar with the risk factors for heart disease and the prevention program served as an important effort in early prevention. Both the school's students and faculty expressed enthusiasm for what they learned and looked forward to the program's return to check progress in developing healthy lifestyles. A number of students tested already had elevated blood cholesterol levels. The Cardiac Prevention Program is being integrated into other aspects of the school curriculum, and the sophomore class will be screened and followed longitudinally for three years.

Of all participants screened thus far, the average age for those screened was 48 years old and almost equally divided among males and females. Those screened indicated a number of risk factors for heart disease, including a high incidence of high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels (over 31 percent of respondents.) Over 62 percent of participants indicated they were overweight and over 75 percent indicated a lack of regular exercise, both risk factors for the development of heart and other chronic diseases.

During the next year, the cardiac prevention program will continue follow-up of participants who are already in the database and continue to add new participants. Follow-up on early participants indicates that many have adhered to lifestyle changes and that the second round of tests results often reflects these improvements.

### **Youth Risk Behaviors**

On an ongoing basis, Southcoast provides a variety of programs and services aimed at preschool through high school aged children to promote healthy behaviors and risk reduction. Historically high rates of teen pregnancy and other risk behaviors, such as smoking, drinking, and relationship and gang violence, caused Southcoast to focus on efforts to reduce youth risk behaviors. As a result of the Community Benefit Strategic Action Plan, the **Youth Risk Behaviors Task Force** (YRBTF) was formed and identified 3 objectives: youth programming, youth resource directory and communication of a positive message.

The YRBTF synthesized information from a variety of area teens. Information compiled from a Southcoast sponsored survey of over 1000 middle and high school students across the greater Fall River, New Bedford, and Wareham region showed what kind of health and related information teens need and where they go to find it. Over 150 teens also spoke out at the Southcoast sponsored Youth Summit 2000 about the types of resources they would like to see in the region. With their input, the YRBTF developed the concept of TEEN LINK, a toll free, regional information telephone line.

The Youth Risk Behaviors Task Force this year continued to promote Teen Link, a truly collaborative effort, that combines and builds on two local services for teens. These include:

- HealthLink, a 24 hour per day automated help line service with over 600 automated educational messages, sponsored by the New Bedford Prevention Partnership;
- Teen Talk Line, a peer volunteer talk line, operated weekday evenings sponsored by the YWCA of Greater New Bedford.

The Southcoast sponsored Teen Link offers one direct toll free line to access either of these services and greatly expand their reach across the region. Teen Link also offers a recorded menu of substance free youth events in the region as well as an opportunity to learn more about (and perhaps join) local youth organizations. This menu is regularly updated by teen volunteers from the New Bedford, Fall River and Wareham areas.

Teen Link has been promoted through television and radio ads, public service announcements, school websites, posters in schools, youth organizations, and free giveaways with the TeenLink phone number. During the past year, call volume continued to increase for the HealthLink component of the talk line. Also, YRB Task Force committee members assisted with recruitment of teen volunteers to staff the Teen Talk Line. Ten new volunteers had been trained by October of 2003. Southcoast plans further publicity efforts to encourage teens to utilize this regional resource.

The YRB Task Force this year also released the fifth in a series of videos produced by the Southcoast Community Benefits program addressing youth issues. This newest video, "Aftershocks 2", addresses youth violence, particularly the epidemic of bullying among middle school children. There are also segments on gender and racial violence, along with portrayals of solutions to violence that are being explored in local school settings and in the community. In keeping with the tone of past videos, "Aftershocks 2" stars local teens speaking out on this issue and how it affects on them. The video is funded by Southcoast Hospitals Group and produced locally by Fire City Productions of Fall River. To date, over 200 videos, along with comprehensive teacher guides, have been distributed to local schools and youth organizations.

### **Responsible Attitudes toward Pregnancy Prevention**

The *RAPP* (Responsible Attitudes toward Pregnancy Prevention) program is in its eighth year. [www.southcoast.org/rapp](http://www.southcoast.org/rapp) Created in response to the region's teen pregnancy and birth rates exceeding state rates, RAPP's ultimate goal is to provide adolescents with important education by presenting objective, accurate and up-to-date information, facilitating discussion on issues of reproductive health and sexuality, engaging youth in creating and fostering positive attitudinal and behavioral changes through peer leadership and civic involvement and promoting parent/child dialogue on these issues. The RAPP program is a 14 hour abstinence-based, comprehensive education program targeted at high school youth. The program has grown significantly from its inception in 1996, from 425 students to over 1600 participants this year. RAPP offers programming at junior high schools, high schools, after school programs, alternative-learning centers for out-of-school youth, a group home for troubled adolescent girls and a local correctional facility.

MAPP (Males Are Part of the Puzzle) includes four male focused initiatives: MAPP curriculum, MAPP Camp, Basic Training for Dads (including the Incarcerated Fathers Program, New Dads in the Community, and Young Dads Program) and the Annual Male Awareness Conference. The South Coast region is ethnically and socially diverse. RAPP participants, including peer leaders and MAPP youth representatives, reflect this diversity. RAPP participants' ethnic, racial and social background information is obtained and results are tabulated and retained by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

All RAPP activities, classroom learning, staff, faculty and peer leader training, community outreach, health fairs, speaking engagements and conferences are offered at no cost to

participating schools and community groups. The RAPP program is totally funded through grants and by Southcoast Hospitals Group.

### **Emergency Outreach**

Our Emergency Department staff continues their commitment to prevention of youth risk behaviors. *Life, Death, Drugs, Treatment* is a play that teaches school children about the dangers of substance abuse and how to access the Emergency Medical System. Emergency Nurses CARE (ENCARE) targets youth from middle through high school as well as church youth groups and community groups to educate about alcohol, drugs, peer pressure and seat belt usage.

### **Wellness, Education and Prevention Screenings**

Southcoast Hospitals Group has a long-standing tradition of community education, prevention and screening activities. Thousands of area residents are reached by these free services every year.

### **Skin Cancer**

Southcoast conducts annual skin cancer screenings each spring. This year, a total of 67 residents were screened at our Fall River site, and 84 were screened at the Oncology Center in New Bedford.

### **Prostate Cancer**

A total of five annual prostate cancer screenings were conducted in the fall in Fall River, New Bedford and Wareham. A total of 187 men underwent PSA testing and digital rectal exams. Several of the screenings specifically targeted populations that are considered both “at-risk” and underserved and were conducted at various sites on our mobile health van in areas in the community. Another outreach screening was conducted in collaboration with HealthFirst Family Care Center at their clinic in Fall River.

The results of the DRE were provided to patients the same day and the results of the PSA within a 7-10 day timeframe. Educational materials supporting annual prostate screening and digital rectal exam were provided as well. Southcoast invested in a number of efforts to target and motivate underserved populations, including targeted direct mail and outreach through workers in the African American, Hispanic, Portuguese and Cambodian communities.

Letters were sent to all participants with both results, as well as to the physicians of the men with any abnormal results. This important educational and free screening was offered to the community to help reduce some of the barriers associated with cancer screening initiatives, and made possible by the efforts of our dedicated health care providers.

### **Women’s Health**

Southcoast is the recipient of the Department of Public Health Women’s Health Initiative grant. This grant attempts to screen and identify cancers in an uninsured population without access to care. In cooperation with the New Bedford YWCA, this initiative targets racial, cultural and ethnic minorities and the under/uninsured.

Southcoast again participated in numerous health fairs across the region, including a Portuguese Health Fair, a Senior Citizen Health Fair and health fairs on-site at industry.

## **SECTION VII**

### **Activity During The Reporting Year Expenditures**

Southcoast in 2003 contributed \$12,998,571 in community benefit and community service programs that reached the disadvantaged, underserved and those at-risk, bringing them services they otherwise would not have been able to access. Our major initiatives concerning health access, cardiovascular disease and youth risk behaviors, all had significant impact, with growing programs that reached large numbers of Southcoast residents.

In addition to community benefit expenditures, Medicaid currently pays Southcoast Hospitals Group \$10.4 million less per year than the actual cost of the services provided to Medicaid beneficiaries. Southcoast plays a critical role in providing care to a substantial Medicaid population and is the largest community hospital provider of Medicaid services in the Commonwealth.

Adding Southcoast's community benefit and community service programs and Southcoast's subsidization of unfunded Medicaid care totaled \$23.4 million in 2003.

## **SECTION VIII**

### **Contact Information**

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