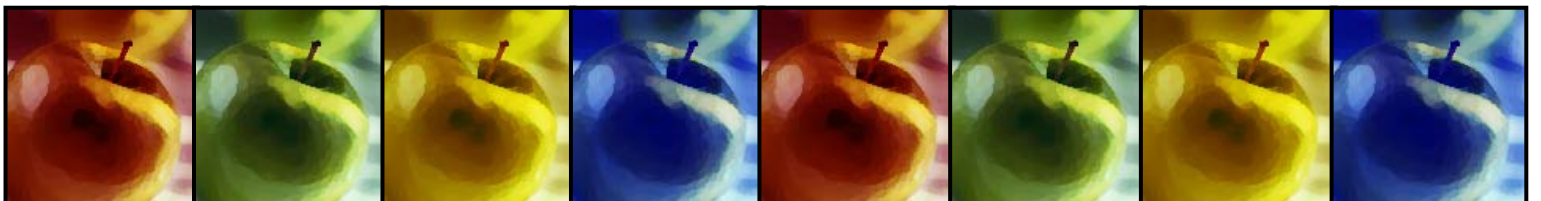
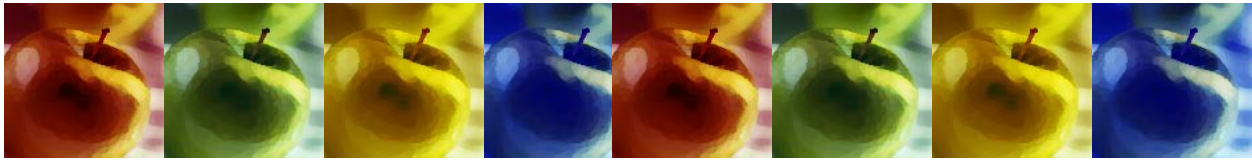


INTRODUCTION





INTRODUCTION

Public health in Oneida County has evolved through a variety of roles to arrive in its current situation. Although in many instances this progression has mirrored the development of public health nationally, it has done so in response to local needs and health conditions and the unique characteristics of the County. Public health activities in Oneida County have been driven more by the demographic changes and needs of the county than by the larger evolution of public health as a discipline. Basically, the health department has done whatever was necessary to combat the threats to the public's health at any given time. Just as the implementation of public health activities was in response to local conditions, so too was the organization of the health department. As local conditions changed, so did the structure of governmental public health.

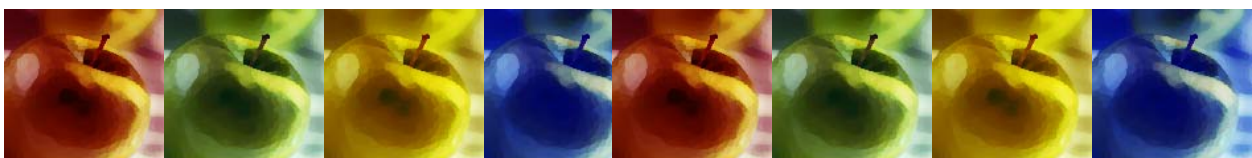
In July of 1973, the Oneida County Health Department was established. The impetus for the formation of the Department was to better coordinate segmented health services to reduce duplication and overlapping of services. Initially, the Department was organized into the Environmental Health, Prevention, and Administration divisions. The City of Utica Health Department, County Nursing Service, Handicapped Children's Program, Broadacres Tuberculosis & Skilled Nursing Home Facility, and the County Veterinarian Service formed the basis of the Department.¹ Since the establishment of the Health Department, economic, social, technological, medical, and political forces changed, and the roles and responsibilities of the Health Department subsequently evolved to reflect these changes. We now find ourselves again amidst such forces of change. OCHD has been challenged in an era of decreased resources to address the escalating demands of public health activity, particularly in light of bio-terrorism and emerging infectious diseases such as SARS, Monkey Pox, and West Nile Virus. To successfully and pro-actively prepare and respond to these changes, a periodic health status assessment of our community is necessary.

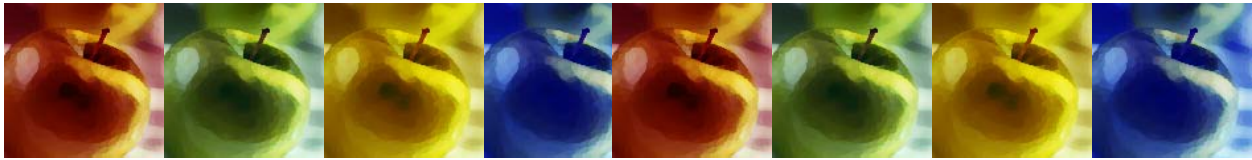
The Assessment Initiative

The New York State Department of Health requires counties to undertake a comprehensive community health assessment once every six- (6) years, with updates provided every two years. The Oneida County Health Department recognizes the opportunity that this state requirement presents to improve our County's overall health and well being. Prompted by the this mandate, the Oneida County Health Department engaged in a process that would result in the development of this *Oneida County Health Assessment Report*. It was anticipated that the Report would:

- Define health problems, and other threats to the health of Oneida County residents;
- Identify key elements of the public health system needed to address those threats;
- Identify roles for public and private providers of personal and public health services, as well as other entities that can effectively improve the public's health;
- Identify health assets and related strengths and gaps in services in the community;
- Identify opportunities to mobilizes community members to work collaboratively towards building a healthier community;
- Facilitate OCHD specific, as well as county-wide health strategic planning activities;
- Provide a mechanism for future integration into a regional health assessment plan; and
- Represent an educational tool and resource for community, leaders, businesses and others regarding health issues, their underlying causes, and their impact on our local communities.

¹ *The Proposal by County Executive William Bryant for an Oneida County Health Department, August 1972*





Principles and Assumptions

It was recognized from the start that the assessment process should be guided by a set of principles and assumptions that would guide the process and ensure that it stayed focused and in line with its original purpose. Towards this end, the OCHD, at its earliest meetings, adopted the following principles and assumptions.

- ▣ The assessment process would recognize that many health and health-related assessment activities have already been done throughout the County. Thus, the OCHD would not attempt to reinvent the wheel but would be informed by and build upon previous community-wide efforts.
- ▣ The OCHD would not focus solely on traditional public health agencies, but on those organizations and institutions across the county, both public and private, that can effectively contribute to improving health.
- ▣ Effective solutions require a common understanding. The assessment process would provide an understanding of public health and potential strategies through the collection and analysis of the best available data, the experience of key partners and stakeholders, and the perceptions of Oneida County's communities.
- ▣ Time constraints would limit the breadth and depth of the assessment. As a result the report will highlight the more prominent issues. This Report should provide the basis for more in-depth analysis and solution development through collaborative venues such as the Oneida County Health Coalition.

The Assessment Structure

To ensure the successful implementation of the assessment process, the participation of key stakeholders committed to improving public health should be included. Thus, an assessment structure was devised to ensure an inclusive but manageable process.

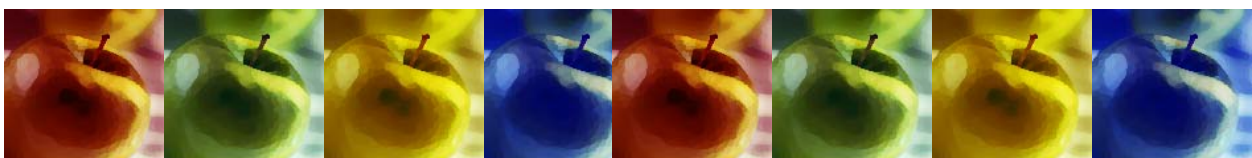
- ▣ A four-member internal OCHD Steering Committee comprised of four subcommittee chairpersons was established. This Committee was responsible for organizing the process and moving it forward. The committee provided guidance throughout the entire process.
- ▣ Four Subcommittees were designated to oversee the planning and assessment activities. Senior OCHD management staff were selected to chair each subcommittee. Other departmental staff and individuals from outside the OCHD were recruited for their expertise, skills, or knowledge, and assisted with committee activities.
- ▣ Community participation was achieved through a community forum, community survey, and community leader interviews that collectively aided in identifying community perceptions about public health and related issues. This structure allowed for input from more than 700 additional persons.

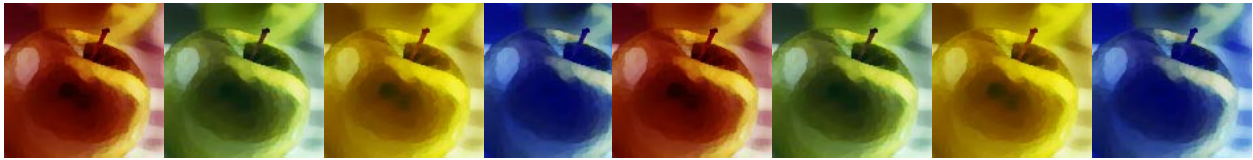
Overview of the Assessment Process

The process through which the *Oneida County Health Assessment Report* was developed included three principal steps. The purpose of each major step is discussed briefly below; additional detail on the purpose and approaches taken to carrying out each step can be found at the start of each of the subsequent sections of this Report.

Step 1 – Community Health Analysis: An essential part of the assessment process, the four-part community health analysis, was intended to provide a common understanding of the health challenges facing Oneida County.

1a - Health Profile: Establishing prevalence, analyzing trends, and identifying other factors that contribute to poor health are necessary first steps in the process of assessing the public's health, and developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies to improve conditions. The profile of current conditions in Oneida County considers: (a) demographics and socioeconomic indicators, (b) health status





indicators, (c) health perceptions and health-related behaviors, and (d) issues of health care delivery and access to care.

1b - Community Themes: Community participation was achieved through a community forum, community survey, and community leader interviews that collectively aided in identifying community perceptions about public health and related issues including a) most important factors for a healthy community, b) factors which most improve the quality of life in a community, c) most important health problems in our community, d) most risky behaviors in our community, e) behaviors which have the greatest impact on overall community health, f) rating of our community as a “healthy community”, g) rating of their own personal health, h) how they pay for health care, i) type of health insurance they have, and j) perceptions about the Oneida County Health Department.

1c - Analysis of Forces and Trends: The focus at this stage was to identify the forces and trends that pose potential threats or opportunities for public health in Oneida County. This appraisal represents a critical phase of the community analysis as it brings to light some of the parameters under which the current public health system operates.

1d - Public Health System Assessment: The purpose of the system assessment was to identify the extent to which organizations and institutions contribute to the delivery of public health services in Oneida County. The assessment provides an overview of the different ways in which providers deliver the Ten Essential Public Health Services, and areas that challenge service delivery.

Step 2 – Goals & Objectives Identification: In this step, the OCHD considered the individual and collective findings of the four components of the Community Health Analysis. This review led to the identification of both crosscutting health infrastructure issues and ten health issues representing the common and pervasive community concerns that provide a focal point for improving the health and well being of our community members. Local strategic planning activities, coupled with the Healthy People 2010 goals and objectives applicable to the ten health issues were identified, and where appropriate, tailored to local conditions.

Step 3 – Strategy Development: The OCHD developed a series of strategies designed to address the goals and objectives identified in the previous step. Strategy development occurred on two levels – crosscutting public health infrastructure strategies and health issue-specific strategies.

Organization of the Report

This Report is organized into eight sections that largely correspond to the individual steps of the assessment process. Following this *Introduction* is Section 2, which comprises the four-part *Community Health Analysis*. In addition to the *Health Profile* (2), the analysis includes *Community Themes and Strengths* (3), an analysis of *Forces and Trends in Public Health* (4), and the *Public Health System Assessment* (5). Section 6, *Strategies Development*, reflects the OCHD’s recommendations for addressing the strategic issues and *Goals and Objectives*, which reflect the broad health infrastructure issues and the ten health areas that, based on the Community Health Analysis these provide a focal point for improving the health in Oneida County. Section 7, *Planning and Implementation* outlines fundamental activities that are needed to improve the health of the community.

