

Karen's Corner



As we enter a new year and a season of change, with a thankful heart, I reflect on my time as Cabinet Secretary for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. Since being appointed by Governor Earl Ray Tomblin in 2013, I have been privileged to lead this incredible agency and am proud of the many initiatives and accomplishments set forth in the past three and a half years.

In 2015, the Department implemented the Safe at Home West Virginia demonstration project. This initiative gives youth ages 12-17 and their families the opportunity for safe, successful and healthy lives by providing wraparound services to children, family members, caregivers and foster parents to support them in developing and maintaining a stable and loving environment in their home community. I am pleased to report that the program will expand to serve all 55 counties by April of this year.

We made strides in serving the medical needs of children across the state. In a report released in October 2015 by the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute's Center for Children and Families, West Virginia was recognized as a leader in providing healthcare coverage for children with 97 percent of the state's children covered by private insurance, West Virginia Children's Health

Insurance Program (WVCHIP) or Medicaid.

Not only are we helping children obtain medical services through health insurance, but with the Medicaid expansion in 2014, West Virginia has seen the biggest drop in adult uninsured rate and had the most new Medicaid enrollees per capita than any other state that expanded Medicaid. As of December 31, 2016, more than 177,000 West Virginians are enrolled in Medicaid expansion.

I am also encouraged by our work relating to the fight against substance abuse. Since 2011, the Governor's Advisory Council on Substance Abuse (GACSA), created by Governor Tomblin, has helped us find more localized ways to combat this problem. This collaboration has resulted in a number of successes, including a decrease in marijuana use and prescription drugs, as well as a decline in the number of oxycodone and hydrocodone-related deaths. These improvements come after 2012 legislation to implement stricter oversight of methadone and pain clinics described as pill mills. To date, our Office of Inspector General has completed numerous surveys of Chronic Pain Management Clinics, revoked the license of one clinic, and denied licensure to 25 clinics, as well as licensed five clinics.

Those looking for individualized substance abuse services and resources can now find assistance at 1-844-HELP4WV. Launched in September of 2015 by Governor Tomblin and DHHR, the state's first-ever 24-hour substance abuse and mental health hotline has provided support to thousands of West Virginians seeking help and recovery services.

In addition, we worked to decrease the number of tragedies that result from substance abuse through the administration of Naloxone, an antidote that can temporarily reverse the overdose effect of opiates and opioids. DHHR's Bureau for Public Health trained first responders in Naloxone administration and preliminary data indicates that more than 3,600 doses were administered in 2016.

With a focus on improved family stability and economic independence, we made it easier for participants of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to attain workforce skills. Recognizing the importance of education and job training when it comes to supporting individuals and preparing them for life's challenges, we announced a partnership with Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College in 2015, which has since expanded to all nine of the state's community colleges.

These are just a few of the many important changes and initiatives I have had the opportunity to lead, and while challenges remain, I am confident that DHHR will continue assisting hard working West Virginians through its essential programs and services. With its many dedicated team members and a vision for a healthier West Virginia, these words of C.S. Lewis come to mind regarding the future: "There are better things ahead than any we leave behind." It has been an honor and a privilege to serve the great state of West Virginia. Take care and God bless.

Karen L. Bowling

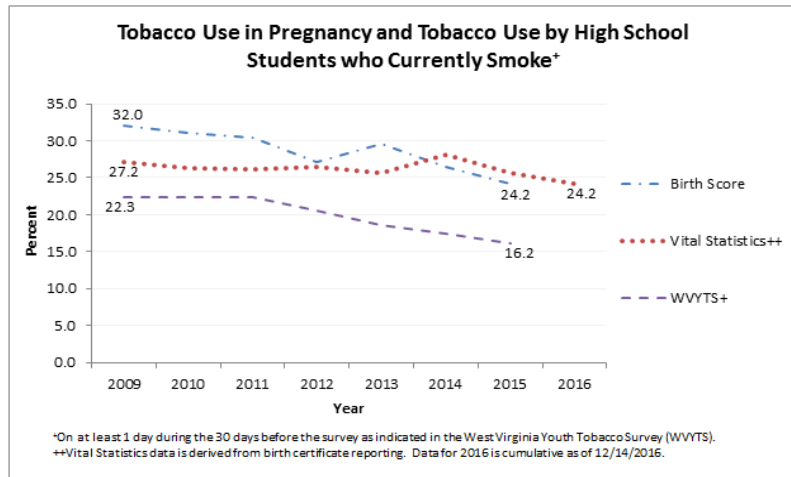
Rates of Smoking during Pregnancy Show Strong Signs of Decline

According to recently released data from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), Bureau for Public Health, smoking rates among pregnant women are steadily declining. Provisional numbers from DHHR's Health Statistics Center indicate the rate of smoking during pregnancy in West Virginia has dropped from 28.2 percent in 2014 to 24.2 percent in 2016.

"We are encouraged to see the downward trend in smoking rates during pregnancy," said Dr. Rahul Gupta, Commissioner and State Health Officer for the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health. "We believe the steady decline is the result of a comprehensive approach including the work of our community partners and programs such as Home Visitation and RAZE, West Virginia's highly successful youth anti-smoking program."

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Rates of Smoking, cont.



The decreases in smoking rates during pregnancy are similar to decreases in youth smoking rates. Data from the 2015 Youth Tobacco Survey indicate the percentage of West Virginia high school students that smoke has decreased to 16.2 percent from 38.5 percent in 2000.

Smoking during pregnancy is a key public health indicator because it contributes to premature birth, certain birth defects and infant death. Families can significantly decrease health risks to their babies by not smoking and not allowing others to smoke around them.

“There is still a significant amount of work to do,” said Gupta. “West Virginia remains well above the United States rate of 8.4 percent for smoking during pregnancy (2014), but it is vitally important to recognize the rate reduction which mirrors the State’s

trend in youth smoking rates.”

As a result of West Virginia’s efforts to decrease smoking, more young women have never smoked, making them more likely to have smoke-free pregnancies. According to Gupta, public health programs and partners have reinforced these messages during well-woman visits, home visits and health care provider training.

Work to further improve the smoking rate during pregnancy is being enhanced by the recent launch of the West Virginia Management of Maternal Smoking (MOMS) Initiative, which includes representatives from DHHR programs, the West Virginia Perinatal Partnership, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

State of Health January Show Highlights WV FED UP Movement

For many people, the start of a new year is an opportunity to make resolutions leading to healthier choices and lifestyle changes. The January episode of DHHR’s *The State of Health* highlights one group that works to do this year round. WV FED UP is a teen-led grassroots movement funded by DHHR’s Bureau for Public Health. This group is made up of students from across the state who are focused on creating healthier school environments and communities in West Virginia, a mission that reflects an overarching goal of DHHR to help residents lead healthier lives.

WV FED UP is empowering students to take a stand against unhealthy processed foods and the misleading labels and myths that often surround them. It all started with a documentary called *FED UP* that exposed dishonesty of the food industry and highlighted the shortened life span that many young people may face. This is especially important in West Virginia where the adult obesity rate is the second highest in the country and the high school obesity rate is fifth highest.

Students involved in WV FED UP are changing the culture of eating by putting away sugary drinks that increase a child’s chance of obesity and diabetes. FED UP teams like the one at George Washington High School in Charleston are growing gardens and making the produce available during lunch as well as putting in filtered water fountains to encourage students to drink more water.

“Initiatives like WV FED UP are critical to addressing the state’s high obesity rate and other chronic health issues,” said DHHR Cabinet Secretary Karen L. Bowling. “As we take on 2017, let’s join West Virginia’s youth in the FED UP movement. It is simple: just drink more water and eat real food, and encourage your family, friends and neighbors to do the same.”

To learn more about the WV FED UP movement, watch DHHR’s January episode of *The State of Health* at <https://youtu.be/POaiDuiPxbQ>.

The West Virginia Library Television Network produces shows at no cost to state agencies. *The State of Health* helps showcase the efforts of DHHR employees as well as the services provided through the Department’s many programs.



Secretary Bowling and WV FED UP students illustrate the amount of sugar in popular sweet drinks.