THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF NORTHWEST MICHIGAN
is mandated by the Public Health Code to promote
wellness, prevent disease, provide quality health care,
address health problems of vulnerable populations, and
protect the environment for the residents and visitors of
Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego Counties.

| P 3 | TABLE OF CONTENTS |
| P 4 | 2 .............................................................. Introduction & Summary of Achievements |
| P 6 | 4 .............................................................. Home Care & Hospice |
| P 8 | 6 .............................................................. Expenses & Revenues |
| P 10 | 8 .............................................................. Environmental Health |
| P 14 | 10 ......................................................... Family & Community Health |
| P 16 | 14 ......................................................... Dental Clinics North |
|   | 16 ......................................................... Building Healthy Communities |
|   | 17 ......................................................... Community Health Assessment & Improvement Initiative |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Photography .............................................. M. Chris Leese, Tim Wieland
Cover Photo ................................................. M. Chris Leese
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OUR MISSION

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REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY
2012 VITAL SIGNS
The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality health care, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego Counties.

On behalf of the Board of Health, the Health Department of Northwest Michigan is pleased to submit this Report to the Community for our residents, community partners, fellow agencies, state and local leadership, charitable contributors, grantors, staff and dedicated volunteers. As stakeholders in our mission, it’s essential that you understand the tremendous value your investments in Health Department programs and services continue to yield. We are grateful for your support, your confidence and your trust as we work to fulfill our mission across Northwest Michigan each year.

Sincerely,

Linda Yaroch, RN, MPH
Health Officer

Joshua Meyerson, MD, MPH
Medical Director

- The Northern Health Plan, a community partnership between Northern Michigan area hospitals and health departments, helps uninsured people gain access to medically necessary care. This eight-county health plan provides services to nearly 3,000 residents in the Health Department’s four-county health district.

- In partnership with the Northern Health Plan and McLaren Northern Michigan, the Health Department supported the Community Health Center of Northern Michigan, a federally-qualified health center, which provided 2,225 clients with a range of comprehensive primary care services.

- Thanks to funding from the Frey Foundation and other local charitable organizations, the Health Department’s Early Childhood Behavioral Health Initiative completed its first full year. The Initiative is a three-pronged strategy including (1) parent support, (2) universal developmental screening and (3) increasing access to behavioral health services for children age 0-5, in Charlevoix and Emmet Counties.

- The Health Department’s Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program screened 1,308 low income, uninsured/underinsured women in a seven-county region, including 849 within the four-county Health District, and supplemented Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) funding with nearly $50,000 from local charities.

- Grant funding from the Michigan Department of Community Health enabled the Health Department to serve nearly 1,500 students through School-Based Health Centers in Mancelona and Pellston, and a new School Wellness Program in Boyne City. This included 498 youth age 10-21 at the Ironmen Health Center in Pellston, and 495 youth in grades K-8 through the Boyne City School Wellness Program.

- Dental Clinics North (DCN) served 23,587 clients through its eight Northern Michigan locations, including 10,280 in the Health District. In addition, 3,655 low-income uninsured clients, of whom 1,594 were from the Health District, received financial assistance for their care in the amount of $855,406 through the Dental Assistance Fund. Dental Clinics North is a partnership of local health departments and Michigan Community Dental Clinics (MCDC), and is administered by the Health Department of Northwest Michigan.

- The Dental Clinics North location in Mancelona renovated and expanded its waiting room and operatory space, and the Traverse City dental clinic relocated to a much larger space within the new Grand Traverse County Health Department facility.

- The Health Department delivered maternal and child health services through a unique integrated service delivery model, resulting in improved birth outcomes and increased breastfeeding and immunization rates. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Community Guide has recognized the integration of immunization and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) services as an evidenced-based practice to increase immunization levels.
• A robust Community Health Assessment was completed in partnership with Charlevoix Area Hospital, Otsego Memorial Hospital, McLaren Northern Michigan and the Northern Health Plan. The assessment revealed Access to Care, including behavioral, maternal and child health care, Obesity and Chronic Disease Prevention, and Substance Abuse (including tobacco use) as priority health issues to be addressed. Community Health Improvement Plans and implementation strategies are being developed based on these findings.

• The Health Department was awarded a two-year Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant to explore cross-jurisdictional sharing arrangements among six Northern Michigan health departments. Its objective is to increase efficiencies and improve health outcomes.

• The Health Department implemented Insight, a comprehensive information management system for all Family and Community Health programs that includes electronic patient health records for clinical services.

• The prestigious 2012 HomeCare Elite Award was given to the Health Department’s Home Care Program. The award recognizes the top 25 percent of home care agencies in the U.S., based on quality care, process measures, and financial performance.

• The Health Department collaborated with Milton Township in Antrim County to establish a Time of Transfer Ordinance, requiring the inspection of water and wastewater facilities at the time of property sale.

• The Health Department’s Environmental Health Program monitored 31 Great Lakes public beaches, and will additionally monitor 19 inland beaches in 2013.

• In cooperation with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Antrim County United Through Ecology, the Health Department continued to address the public health threat created by the Wick’s groundwater contamination plume by expanding the Well First Policy in the affected area.

GRANTS & COMMUNITY SUPPORT

THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF NORTHWEST MICHIGAN is grateful for the support we received from community organizations and our community partners during 2012. Your generosity makes it possible for us to sustain and expand the kinds of programs that make Northwest Michigan a healthy place to live, work and visit.

Antrim County High Tea for Breast Cancer Prevention
Bellaire Lioness Club
Char-Em United Way
Charlevoix Area Hospital
Charlevoix County Community Foundation
Charlevoix Women’s Circle
Frey Foundation
McLaren Northern Michigan

Northern Health Foundation
Northern Health Plan
Otsego Memorial Hospital - Gaylord
Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation
Rally for the Cure
Zonta International

Antrim County High Tea for Breast Cancer Prevention partners with the Health Department to ensure every woman in Antrim County has full access to mammography services and follow-up treatment.

When Maureen and Duane Pajak of Walloon Lake needed in-home professional care following major surgeries, the Health Department’s home health care staff became a lifeline for nursing, medication, physician communication, patient advocacy and basic personal needs.

Maureen and Duane Pajak dedicated their lives to helping others. For Maureen, a teacher, and Duane, a college professor, working with and caring for students was second nature. But when Maureen—who was already suffering from cardiac problems and other chronic health issues—needed major knee surgery, the continuing after-care was more than the couple could manage on their own. Maureen’s physician contacted the Health Department of Northwest Michigan’s Home Health Care staff to establish a plan of in-home care.

“It’s common for us to make two to three visits per week at first,” explains Donna Carlson-Alkire, Home Care and Hospice Supervisor for the Health Department. Carlson-Alkire, a registered nurse, became the Pajaks’ primary in-home caregiver. “First, we had to do the bloodwork, wound assessment and educate both Maureen and Duane about the medications Maureen would be taking.”

But home health care often goes well beyond administering direct care to a patient. In fact, as Carlson-Alkire can attest, spending time with the patient’s family is an essential part of the care plan because it empowers loved ones to provide critical care when the professional home care staff cannot be there. In addition, family members can often give important feedback when the patient cannot.

“Patients’ loved ones, like Duane, have to become 24/7 caregivers,” she says. “We always have to be prepared to educate family members about what their loved one may be experiencing, and how they can help. We train them to be alert, and to know what to expect.”

Before long, Duane found himself needing in-home care, following major back surgery that was performed at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. U of M referred follow-up care to the Health Department, so Duane could return home to Walloon Lake for his recovery. Carlson-Alkire and her colleagues worked closely with U of M Hospital—and with Maureen—to establish Duane’s plan of care.

The HomeCare Elite™ is an annual compilation of the most successful home care providers in the United States, based on quality of care, quality improvement, patient experience, process measure implementation and financial performance. Compiled by National Research Corporation and DecisionHealth, this market-leading review has placed the Health Department of Northwest Michigan’s Home Care services among the nation’s best. It is the only health department in Michigan that offers both hospice and home care services.
“Their skills are very reassuring at a time when it can be stressful for their patients,” Maureen says of the Health Department’s Home Care team. “We are both very grateful for all the nurses… and for the superb care and follow-up we received during our recuperation periods.”

Carlson-Alkire points out that she and home health aides like Tammy Kresnak, who also provided in-home care to the Pajaks, have to stay alert to the “big picture” underlying the plan of care. Looking beyond the immediate needs of their patient, or patients, they can often bridge gaps in care and prevent problems before they arise.

“Patients get specialized care from many different sources,” Carlson-Alkire says. “They see a knee doctor. They see a cardiologist. They see a pain specialist. But we’re there to look at the whole patient, the resources they have available, their environment and the different kinds of health problems they’re facing. We interact with their providers; we call pharmaceutical manufacturers; we help the patient get answers when they don’t know who to call.”

In addition to registered nurses and home health aides, the Health Department’s home care staff has access to medical-social workers, pharmacists, therapists and other resources to meet the needs of the patient and his or her family. All staff are cross-trained to provide both home care and hospice services, assuring a smooth transition for the patient and family if hospice services are needed. The Health Department partners with teen grief and support groups, hospitals, schools and churches. Services extend beyond coping with illness and bereavement, and include coping with other difficult or traumatic family situations, such as a parent being deployed overseas for an extended period.

It takes extensive training and tremendous personal dedication to provide the kind of services needed by home health care patients. In addition to being RNs, the Health Department’s home health nurses must have several years’ experience in acute care. Their clinical expertise must be accompanied by interpersonal and social skills that are constantly put to the test, as they are called into patients’ homes during a time of great discomfort and uncertainty for both the patient and his or her family.

“The nurses are kind, competent, and do not hesitate to go the extra mile to ensure the best possible care for their patients,” said Maureen. “When you are in great pain, any comfort is appreciated.”

10,175 TOTAL HOME CARE & HOSPICE VISITS IN 2012

![Graph showing monthly visits for basic care, hospice, and home care in 2012.](image-url)
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EXPENSES & REVENUES

EXPENSES BY TYPE

INCLUDES DENTAL CLINICS NORTH

EXPENSES BY PROGRAM

$10,516,324

DENTAL CLINICS NORTH

PERSONNEL

CONTRACTUAL EXPENSES

SUPPLIES

HEALTH SERVICES

COMMUNICATIONS

TRAVEL

SPACE

EQUIPMENT

OTHER

$22,020,892

TOTAL:

HEALTH DEPARTMENT of Northwest Michigan

P6
The Health Department invests carefully in services that benefit every part of your community.
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The Health Department holds primary responsibility for the surveillance, investigation and prevention of waterborne illness in Northwest Michigan. Surveillance activities include private homes and small public water supplies, such as schools, day care centers, restaurants, churches and businesses. On average, the Health Department responds to about 350 violations of Federal drinking water safety standards each year at small public water supplies.

The Northern Michigan Regional Laboratory serves a 19-county region from its location at the Health Department facility in Gaylord. In partnership with the Michigan Departments of Community Health and Environmental Quality, the lab provides timely, accurate water analyses to serve public health, clinical and epidemiological needs.

During 2012, changes in postal package routing made it impossible to consistently deliver water samples to the laboratory via U.S. Mail within the required 30-hour time frame. As a result, the Health Department established a program that allows residents throughout its four-county Health District to simply drop water samples off at its facilities in Bellaire, Charlevoix, Gaylord and Harbor Springs.

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PUBLIC BATHING BEACH SAFETY MONITORING

The Health Department’s Bathing Beach Safety Monitoring program took more than 1,500 test samples at a total of 35 Northwest Michigan beaches during 2012. The samples were tested for the presence of E.coli bacteria, and the beaches’ water supplies, restrooms and equipment were evaluated to protect public safety.

The Health Department also collected 216 samples from nine local beaches as part of a rapid testing pilot program, the Immunomagnetic Separation/Adenosine Triphosphate (IMS/ATP) method, for the rapid detection and quantitative measure of E.coli in recreational water.
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CELEBRATING FAMILY

“The staff was friendly and not at all intimidating. I felt comfortable asking questions.”
“The staff is so friendly, and I truly appreciate the benefits.”
“The nurses were so patient, and explained things well.”

“Very friendly and cheerful staff! Thanks!”
“Eagerness to help; willingness to listen.”

MATERNAL INFANT HEALTH PROGRAM AND NEWBORN HOME VISITS

7,842 HOME AND OFFICE VISITS

The Health Department’s Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP) assists families with pregnant women or infants by providing information on pregnancy, preparing for the baby, infant care, infant feeding and parenting through a team that includes nurses, social workers and registered dieticians. Families that participate in MIHP are less likely to have low birth-weight infants. During Newborn Home Visits, Health Department nurses check the baby’s weight, provide breastfeeding support, answer questions and provide important information on caring for a new baby.

WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC) NUTRITION PROGRAM

3,035 WIC PARTICIPANTS

The WIC Program protects the health of low-income pregnant women, as well as their infants and children up to age 5, who would otherwise be at nutritional risk. The program provides nutritious foods, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health services within the community. WIC food packages are valued at more than $60 per month, and include infant formula, cereal, milk, eggs, cheese, juice, fresh fruits and vegetables, and peanut butter. Breastfeeding peer support is also available.

• Every dollar spent on WIC saves more than $3.50 in subsequent health care costs.
• Pregnant women served by WIC enter prenatal care earlier, and have lower smoking rates.
• Women enrolled in WIC deliver fewer low birth-weight infants.
• Children served by WIC are less likely to be anemic, and are more likely to receive proper health care & immunizations.

EARLY CHILDHOOD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

28 FAMILIES SERVED

The Early Childhood Behavioral Health Initiative seeks to establish and sustain a supportive family network to promote social and emotional development, and to enhance behavioral health services for young children age 0-5 in Charlevoix, Emmet and northern Antrim Counties. Four successful Parent Networking Nights were held during 2012; these provided parents of young children with a free evening of dinner and child care while meeting other parents and learning about helpful parenting and child development resources. Ages & Stages developmental screening was added to the Health Department’s Web site at www.nwhealth.org/agesandstages. The Initiative offers support to all parents, regardless of income or insurance status.

FLUORIDE VARNISH APPLICATIONS

2,184 APPLICATIONS

Fluoride varnish is a protective coating that fights tooth decay, one of the most common and preventable diseases in children. The coating is painted on teeth to help prevent new cavities, and to stop cavities that have already begun to form. The coating attaches easily to the teeth, and makes tooth enamel harder. Fluoride varnish applications are available to children participating in WIC, which included 1,205 children in 2012.
The Health Department provides childhood hearing and vision screening to help prevent delays in the development of speech, language and social skills, which will determine academic performance. Hearing and vision screening identifies problems that would otherwise go undetected, and connects children with essential health care resources before further hearing or vision loss can occur.

CHILDREN’S SPECIAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES

The Children’s Special Health Care Services program covers specialty medical care and equipment costs for families with a child who has a chronic health condition. Nurses and program representatives also connect families with community services, medical equipment, a parent hotline, and travel and lodging assistance for medical appointments.

SCHOOL-BASED SERVICES

The Health Department’s child and adolescent health centers, which include the Hornet Health Center in Pellston and the Ironmen Health Center in Mancelona, provide primary care and mental health services on school campuses. The Boyne City School Wellness Program, launched in 2011, includes nursing services, group and individual health education, school staff training, and mental health services for elementary and middle school students.

PATIENTS RATE THEIR CLINIC EXPERIENCE

- Written Materials Helpful: 95%
- Appointment Time Convenient: 99%
- Staff Helpfulness “Excellent”: 95%
- Staff Attitude “Excellent”: 97%

BLOOD LEAD SCREENING

The Health Department screens children for exposure to lead, which can damage the nervous system, kidneys and blood, and is particularly harmful to the developing nervous systems in fetuses and children under six years of age. Common sources of lead exposure in children are house dust contaminated by lead-based paint, and soil contaminated by leaded paint or decades of industrial and motor vehicle emissions.
**CELEBRATING FAMILY & COMMUNITY HEALTH (CONTINUED)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION</strong></th>
<th><strong>MORE THAN 150 STUDENTS AND ADULTS INVOLVED IN COALITION WORK</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,100 STUDENTS AND 2,300 ADULTS REACHED</strong></td>
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The Health Department’s substance abuse prevention programs are research-based, and are considered best practices for preventing the abuse of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and other substances. Preventing abuse among adolescents means preventing a lifetime of health and social problems. Substance abuse leads to suicide, early and unsafe sexual activity, and motor vehicle accidents.

School districts in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego Counties have adopted 24/7 tobacco-free policies, in collaboration with the Health Department’s Tobacco Reduction Coalition. Emmet and Otsego County school districts now boast 100 percent participation in these programs. In addition, funding was received in 2012 for a Tobacco-Free Parks and Beaches Initiative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCER CONTROL PROGRAM</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1,308 WOMEN SCREENED, INCLUDING 849 FROM FOUR-COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT</strong></td>
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The Health Department provides low-income, uninsured women with free breast and cervical cancer screening, including mammograms. This provides an opportunity to identify cancer at the earliest possible stage, when it is most treatable. If a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer, enrollment in the Medicaid Treatment Act covers costs related to treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>WISEWOMAN PROGRAM</strong></th>
<th><strong>857 PARTICIPANTS</strong></th>
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Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation, or WISEWOMAN, screens low-income, uninsured or under-insured women age 40-64 for heart disease and stroke risk factors, such as nutrition, physical activity, stress and tobacco use. The Health Department’s Public Health Nurses provide counseling and referrals to help clients meet health improvement goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>COLORECTAL HEALTH SCREENING PROGRAM</strong></th>
<th><strong>182 CLIENTS SCREENED</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States. It is also a cancer that is fully preventable with screening. That’s why the Health Department provides uninsured or under-insured women and men, age 50-64, with an at-home screening test that is then analyzed at the Health Department’s Northern Michigan Regional Laboratory, and with free colonoscopies if program criteria are met.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM</strong></th>
<th><strong>1,289 PARTICIPANTS</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The Health Department’s Family Planning services help men and women make well-informed reproductive health choices, so they can plan for a healthy pregnancy or prevent an unwanted pregnancy. Services include a health history, physical exam, counseling on birth control methods, dispensing of contraceptives such as pills, depo shots and nuva rings, and medical follow-up when abnormalities are discovered in the reproductive system.
MIChild and Healthy Kids provide pregnant women and children up to age 19 with health insurance coverage through the State of Michigan. MIChild provides a Blue Cross/Blue Shield policy for just $10 per family per month, while Healthy Kids provides free health insurance for those who qualify. Plan First! enrollment provides coverage for reproductive health exams and supplies for women ages 19-44. The Health Department works with clients to guide them through the enrollment processes of these complex but highly beneficial resources.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE INVESTIGATION

170 COMMUNICABLE DISEASE INVESTIGATIONS, 257 SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE INVESTIGATIONS

The Health Department investigates all reportable communicable diseases in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego Counties. These include such diseases as hepatitis, giardiasis, meningitis, salmonellosis and sexually-transmitted diseases. Interviews are conducted with infected individuals, and also with family, friends, co-workers and others who may have been in contact and are at risk. Health education and treatment is provided, if needed, to prevent the disease from spreading.

IMMUNIZATIONS

13,135 DOSES ADMINISTERED, 13,252 DOSES DISTRIBUTED

Immunizations prevent diseases that can be dangerous – even deadly – by helping the body safely develop immunity to disease. The Health Department administers and distributes vaccines to prevent the spread of polio, measles, mumps, rubella, influenza, tetanus, diphtheria, chicken pox, meningitis, whooping cough and other communicable diseases. Immunizations are provided in the WIC Program and at the Hornet Health Center, Ironmen Health Center, Health Department office clinics, or in other community locations, such as schools.

THE CENTRAL INTAKE STAFF

ensures as many client phone calls as possible are answered by a live person. During 2012, they assisted 36,409 callers, using their extensive knowledge of programs and patient needs.
Leah Claus is no stranger to the healthcare system. As a registered nurse, the 27-year-old Alanson resident provided care and support to young patients at Petoskey Child Health Associates. But in the past few years, Leah has spent more time on the receiving end of healthcare. She was diagnosed with Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis (PSC), a disease of the bile ducts that often leads to liver failure. She had her first liver transplant in 2003, but required another in 2005 because her body rejected the first transplant. Then, in 2006, she received a third liver transplant because the second transplant was also rejected.

And, as if that wasn’t enough medical trauma, Leah is now recovering from hip replacement surgery, because the heavy use of anti-rejection drugs contributed to bone disease.

“I have lived with chronic pain for many years,” Leah said. “I am really looking forward to being able to walk even just a few steps without pain.”

The chronic pain and bone disease also affected Leah’s jaw, which began popping and clicking when she opened her mouth. The pain caused her to grind and clench her teeth, which then led to extreme tooth sensitivity due to cracks and wear. She scheduled an appointment with Dr. Vagalau, a dentist at Dental Clinics North in Harbor Springs, to see if she could have something done to alleviate the pain before her hip surgery. Dr. Vagalau recommended a bite splint, but Leah’s disability insurance would not cover the cost of the splint – and her medical bills were about to get very big with her upcoming hip surgery.

Dr. Vagalau turned to the Dental Clinics North Special Dental Assistance Fund for help. Dental Clinics North in Harbor Springs is one of eight community dental clinics in Northern Michigan developed through a partnership between local health departments. They are managed by the Health Department of Northwest Michigan, with dental staffing and oversight provided by Michi-
gan Community Dental Clinics. The Special Dental Assistance Fund was established to help patients pay for dental services that are needed to alleviate pain.

As a result of Dr. Vagalau’s efforts, funding was provided to help defray the cost of Leah’s treatment, and her bite splint was fitted just before her hip surgery. “This is one less struggle I will have to endure during my healing process,” Leah remarked. “Thank you for the professional treatment! The staff at Dental Clinics North has been just wonderful.” Leah is currently recovering from her surgery and reports that her new bite splint has taken care of the pain in her jaw.

Dr. Vagalau has been with Dental Clinics North since 2005, and is passionate about her work. “Many of our patients have complicated medical histories,” she noted. “I love helping them connect the dots between their oral status and their general health and wellbeing.”

Dental Clinics North—Traverse City staff.

Dental Clinics North, a partnership of local health departments, is administered by the Health Department of Northwest Michigan with clinical services provided by Michigan Community Dental Clinics. We work together to increase access to oral health care for children and adults with MIChild/Healthy Kids Delta Dental, Medicaid, and Northern Dental Plan, and to improve the oral health of the community.

TOTAL CLIENTS SERVED
23,587, including 10,280 from Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet and Otsego Counties.

CLIENTS SERVED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALPENA</td>
<td>1,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHEBOYGAN</td>
<td>1,664</td>
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<tr>
<td>EAST JORDAN</td>
<td>2,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAYLORD</td>
<td>3,100</td>
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<tr>
<td>MANCELONA</td>
<td>2,619</td>
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<tr>
<td>PETOSKEY/HARBOR SPRINGS</td>
<td>2,312</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRAVERSE CITY</td>
<td>5,965</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEST BRANCH</td>
<td>2,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOSPITAL PROGRAM</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC FLUORIDE VARNISH (HDNW)</td>
<td>1,205</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dental Clinics North—Traverse City staff.

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REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY
2012 VITAL SIGNS

Say AAH! for Dr. Clark in the Mancelona clinic.
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Building Healthy Communities is a grant-funded initiative supporting policy, systems and environmental change strategies that help to reduce chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease and stroke in communities. This includes increasing physical activity and the consumption of fruits and vegetables.

**FARMER’S MARKETS**

During 2012, the Health Department worked with Farmer’s Markets in Boyne City and Charlevoix, and also began working with the Farmer’s Market in Pellston.

All three markets participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program. SNAP is the nation’s largest nutritional assistance program. Its clients use an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) debit card, also known as a “Bridge Card,” to pay for farmer’s market produce with their SNAP benefits.

**SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL**

The Health Department worked with the Boyne City, Charlevoix, East Jordan, Gaylord and Pellston Schools to establish Safe Routes to School (SRTS) in each of their communities. City leaders, school administrators, parents and students participated in special events, including planning meetings, school assemblies and special days for students to walk or bike safely to school rather than riding in a bus or car. The results included action plans to create safe, walkable, bikable communities, with full cooperation between the school district, the city and the Health Department.
The Health Department of Northwest Michigan has facilitated a robust Community Health Assessment process, covering an eight-county region across the tip of the mitt. The assessment was conducted in partnership with District Health Department #4, Charlevoix Area Hospital, McLaren Northern Michigan, the Northern Health Plan, and Otsego Memorial Hospital.

More than 1,000 Northern Michigan residents shared their thoughts in focus group meetings and surveys. Health indicators such as leading causes of death, number of primary care physicians and statistics on smoking, drinking and drug use, were collected.

After all of this information was collected and organized, community-wide groups selected the following three community health priorities:

- Obesity and chronic disease prevention
- Access to care, including maternal and child health and behavioral health
- Substance abuse and tobacco use

Next, teams will be organized to develop a regional Community Health Improvement Plan for each of the top priorities.

One thing is clear: Even the strongest partnerships among hospitals, health care providers, and health departments cannot impact community health alone. High school graduation rates, community planning and design, access to healthy foods and recreational activities, and air and water quality have as much, or greater, impact on health than a person seeing a doctor or nurse when he or she is sick. Therefore, gathering information, reviewing data, and setting priorities are only the first steps of this long-term community health improvement initiative.

SPECIAL THANKS to the Work Group members from the Antrim County Community Collaborative, the Human Services Coordinating Body of Charlevoix and Emmet Counties, and the Otsego Human Services Network for their assistance with this project.