



Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services
74 West Road, Hazard Building, Cranston, RI 02920

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MEDIA CONTACTS

EOHHS: Sophie O'Connell, 401-275-3837

RIDOH: Joseph Wendelken, 401-641-8726

RIDEA: Meghan Connelly, 401-462-0509

State Leaders Highlight Innovative Investments to Build Healthier Communities in Woonsocket

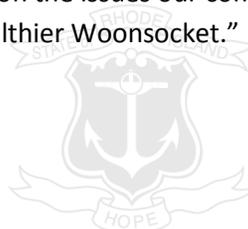
CRANSTON, R.I. (March 31, 2016) – Several members of Governor Raimondo's Health Cabinet along with the First Gentleman traveled to Woonsocket today to highlight investments designed to build healthier communities and expand access to high-quality, affordable services in northern Rhode Island.

The day's schedule included a community event showcasing progress by the Woonsocket Health Equity Zone (HEZ) during its first year of implementation; an awards ceremony highlighting an innovative new partnership with a local school to support job training and lead poisoning prevention; and lunch at a local senior center.

"Governor Raimondo's budget makes important investments that will help Rhode Islanders live healthier, happier lives," said Health and Human Services Secretary Elizabeth Roberts. "Equally important as these statewide investments are innovative initiatives happening at the local level, which are helping to change the conversation about health and wellness in our state. I'm very pleased that members of my team took the time to meet with community members to celebrate their accomplishments and listen to their concerns."

Thundermist Health Center heads up the Woonsocket HEZ initiative, which has identified drug overdose, trauma informed care, food access, and teen health as community health priorities. Raimondo has praised HEZ as an innovative model that is helping Rhode Island emerge as a national leader in building healthier communities. Overall, Rhode Island has invested approximately 3.5 million dollars in federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funding to establish 11 such geographic areas in all five counties across the state, which are designed to eliminate health disparities using place-based strategies to promote healthy communities.

"As the backbone agency behind the Woonsocket Health Equity Zone, Thundermist is pleased to join here today with the First Gentleman and members of the state's Health Cabinet to celebrate the past year's accomplishments," said Chuck Jones, President and CEO of Thundermist Health Center. "In year two, we look forward to expanding the dialogue on the issues our community has identified as the most pressing. Together we can achieve a healthier Woonsocket."



“Health does not begin in the doctor’s office. Health starts in the places where we live, learn, work, and play,” said Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). “The innovative work being done by the Woonsocket HEZ demonstrates how communities can come together to make changes that support healthy living, such as expanding access to nutritious food and getting comprehensive recovery resources to those who are experiencing substance use disorders.”

The Woonsocket HEZ recently completed a comprehensive year 1 needs assessment of the city’s food systems and is implementing a year 2 work plan to address gaps in access to healthy, affordable foods. The HEZ event included tours of a new culinary incubator space under construction at NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley.

“Today’s event shows just how much communities can accomplish when they work together,” First Gentleman Andy Moffit said. “The Woonsocket HEZ continues to do great work that will help more people get access to healthier foods. The new culinary incubator space at NeighborWorks is another valuable addition. Rhode Island is fortunate to have a thriving local food scene, and this new space will play a huge role in supporting the local food economy in Woonsocket.”

“It is imperative that people of all ages understand how fresh and nutritious foods make them healthy, happy and productive citizens,” said Mayor Baldelli-Hunt. “The residents of the State of Rhode Island are fortunate that Governor Raimondo and her Health Cabinet recognize the importance of promoting healthy lifestyles.”

In addition to health equity, innovative partnerships at the community, state and federal levels have led to a new initiative to address lead poisoning – while helping students develop skills that matter for success. With support from the US Environmental Protection Agency and Rhode Island Department of Health, the Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center has begun to offer the Lead Renovator/Remodeler license course to high school students – one of the first schools in the country to do so. Certificates were awarded today to students who completed the course, which teaches them how to safely complete work in homes with lead paint.

Raimondo’s FY17 budget proposal includes \$187,000 to support RIDOH’s Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. It also increases senior center funding to \$600,000 so every community can have a senior center and benefit from essential services like rehabilitation counseling and continuing education. While Dr. Alexander-Scott attended the Health Equity Zone and Lead Certification ceremony, Director of Elderly Affairs Charlie Fogarty had lunch with seniors at Senior Services, Inc. to talk with them about additional ways the Department can help them in leading an independent, healthy and dignified lifestyle.

“Senior centers have been, and continue to be, valuable community assets, providing significant benefits to older adults and their families,” said Director Fogarty. “Rhode Island is fortunate to have a long list of vibrant centers, such as Senior Services, Inc., serving as gateways in the community where adults can



manage and monitor their health, socialize with friends, access benefits, learn new skills and, most importantly, have fun.”

The trip to Woonsocket is part of a broader effort by the Health Cabinet to hold more regular meetings in communities across Rhode Island.

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