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Good Nutrition in the Valley Remains Weighty Problem

HARC Data Points to Challenges

(PALM DESERT, CA) – Diet and nutrition experts across the Coachella Valley

are promoting the virtues of eating lots of green vegetables and fruit in March, as the profession celebrates National Nutrition Month. Statistics from the Palm Desert-based Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) should give those messages heightened urgency.

More than 184,000 adults in eastern Riverside County are overweight, based on their measured Body Mass Index. The regional number represents an estimated 38.3% of the population in 2007, the most recent year in which such statistics are available. Nationally, 34% of adults are considered over weight, based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP). Some encouragement, at least in relative terms, can be found in the fact that 17.9% of adults here in the valley and surrounding areas are considered obese, which is nearly half of the 34% nationwide.

High cholesterol in our region, however, remains a stubborn challenge, with 27.7% of those surveyed reporting excessive readings. That compares to the national average of 15.6%.

Problems with high blood pressure follow that trend, with HARC reporting 32.3%, or more than 176,000 adults in Eastern Riverside County, battling the condition. That's nearly two percentage points higher than the U.S. average.

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These factors, along with diabetes and unhealthy behaviors such as cigarette smoking, contribute greatly to the risk of heart disease. The American Heart Association estimates that 2,200 Americans die of cardiovascular disease every day – an average of one death every 39 seconds. One in three adults, or 82 million people, suffer from at least one form of the disease, while a reported 90% of women have been diagnosed with one or more risk factors.

Heart disease and strokes are largely preventable if risk factors are lowered. The keys, of course, are two very familiar challenges: diet and exercise.

“The data related to weight, cholesterol and blood pressure in eastern Riverside County could not be more clear,” said Glen Grayman MD, President of the HARC Board. “We have a problem. And, although the entire country faces similar challenges with these modern day health menaces, they remain, at least for the most part, a more acute threat in our Valley and nearby areas.”

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About HARC

Formed in 2006 by a consortium of more than 35 public and private healthcare agencies, the Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) conducts a confidential community health status assessment in eastern Riverside County every 3 years to identify major health and quality of life issues. The nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization is funded in part by contributions from community partners, as well as entities that contract with the agency for customized public health research. More information can be obtained by calling HARC at (760) 404-1945, or visiting the organization’s website at www.harcddata.org.