Tennessee Institute of Public Health receives ARC grant

JOHNSON CITY – The Tennessee Institute of Public Health (TNIPH), which is housed in the East Tennessee State University College of Public Health, has received grant funding to encourage new initiatives that will improve overall health for the most economically distressed Tennessee counties of Appalachia.

The “Regional Roadmap for a Healthier Appalachian Tennessee” will provide 20 community partner groups with training, technical assistance and grant funding needed to implement strategic local health projects.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funded the collaborative grant to TNIPH in partnership with matching funds from the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation, the Niswonger Foundation and Eastman Chemical. Ginny Kidwell, program director for TNIPH, will lead the project.

Other contributors to the project include the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, the Tennessee Department of Health, the National Network of Public Health Institutes, the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, the ETSU College of Public Health and the First Tennessee Development District.

The competitive grant program will award $2,500 in funding to support 20 local health projects in 37 of the state’s most distressed counties. Successful applicants will establish multi-sector health initiatives that link economic development and business with health and human service organizations and community stakeholders.

Kidwell said community groups will gain greater capacity to form lasting partnerships, and residents will benefit from improved health programs that affect health factors and economic outcomes. Improvements will be measured by results in the national County Health Rankings and highlighted in the Tennessee ThreeStar Program for improving rural economic development. By many measures, Tennessee is an unhealthy state where the prevalence of obesity, cancer deaths, infant mortality, diabetes complications and substance abuse are notably severe.

“Public health is a critical component, along with education and economic development, for significantly improving overall quality of life in our communities,” Kidwell said. “Greater community involvement leads to health outcomes that effectively address local issues. Personal behaviors account for the greatest proportion of early death in this nation, so health promotion and prevention strategies are essential in improving health. Where we live matters, so education about healthy habits is especially critical in Appalachia, where we face many serious challenges.”

Dr. Randy Wykoff, executive director of TNIPH and dean of the College of Public Health, agreed that a grant program that encourages collaboration and innovative strategies will be widely beneficial.
“We believe very strongly that community-based efforts to improve health, enhance economic development and promote education will result in real improvements in the overall quality of life in our region,” Wykoff said. “Ms. Kidwell is to be commended for building a coalition of regional partners that will support these vital efforts.”

TNIPH is a state-mandated convener of organizations, agencies and groups established to build and foster the collaborations necessary to improve the public’s health across Tennessee.

For more information about the “Regional Roadmap for a Healthier Appalachian Tennessee” project or information about submitting letters of intent to apply for mini-grants, contact Kidwell at (423) 439-4651 or kidwell@etsu.edu.

# # #