

## St. Louis Regional Health Commission Working to Improve Citizens Health

By Ed Bryant

*Special to the Urban Connection*

St. Louis – A local network of individuals with the responsibility and commitment to improve health in St. Louis are working to increase access to health care, reduce health disparities and improve health outcomes for all St. Louisans through the St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC).

A regional authority formed in May 2001, it includes governments, health care providers and community leaders, who work in close collaboration to achieve the common goal of improving health care in St. Louis.

“St. Louis has excellent health care facilities and institutions, but when you look at the overall health status of our region, many of the region’s health outcomes are particularly poor as compared to other regions,” said Peter Sortino, RHC chairman.

The RHC was formed to address these problems and find lasting solutions that will improve health and change the way health care is delivered in St. Louis City and St. Louis County.

“It’s quite evident that significant inequities exist when it comes to who can access our health care system,” said James Buford, one of the RHC’s 19 commissioners, and president/ceo of the Urban League of Metro St. Louis. “Improving health care in St. Louis will help equalize the overall life chances for all of the city’s citizens.”

Currently, the RHC is developing a comprehensive snapshot of the health care system in St. Louis.

This “situational analysis” report will be released in March 2003, and will be a comprehensive look at the region’s primary and specialty care delivery systems.

Recommendations for system improvements will be based on this report. In addition, by the end of 2003, the RHC plans to create a strategic plan for delivering health care services, especially to those most in need.

“What we’re finding is that there are significant barriers for people to receive health care in St. Louis,” said Robert Freund, ceo of the RHC. “Our current system is fragmented and not designed to meet the challenges we currently face.

“We’re fortunate to have a strong network of concerned citizens who are

committed to improving the way health care is delivered in St. Louis,” Freund continued. “These individuals are working closely with others in the community to create and nurture a truly inclusive health planning process that will result in improved access, reduced disparities and better health outcomes.”

The RHC needs your input and support. If you would like more information about the St. Louis Regional Health Commission or would like to get involved, visit [www.stlrhc.org](http://www.stlrhc.org) on the web or call (314) 534-9270.

*Ed Bryant is the director of Community Engagement and Communications, St. Louis Regional Health Commission.*

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*National Urban League President Hugh B. Price will be the keynote speaker.*

The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis’ 85<sup>th</sup> annual dinner meeting takes place at 7 p.m., March 10 at the Millennium Hotel, 400 S. Fourth St. in downtown St. Louis. For more information on the annual dinner, contact the Urban League’s Special Events office at 314-615-3645.