



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**COMMUNITY LEADERS MEETING TO PREVIEW AND DISCUSS
PBS DOCUMENTARY THAT LINKS HEALTH STATUS TO SOCIAL CONDITIONS**

**Community Screenings and Discussion Forums for Groundbreaking PBS Documentary
to be Held at Downtown Ann Arbor District Library for Members of the Public**

YPSILANTI, Mich., March 4, 2008—The Washtenaw County Public Health Department, in partnership with the University of Michigan School of Public Health and Office of Public Health Practice, will preview the first segment of a new four-hour PBS documentary entitled, *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?* to approximately 200 Washtenaw County community leaders on March 12 at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor.

Immediately following the screening, invitees will discuss their impressions of the documentary with a panel of five community leaders, specifically chosen to represent diverse viewpoints from around Washtenaw County. Individuals invited to the sneak preview include members of the media, local politicians and leaders from the healthcare, business, faith and advocacy communities. Local radio personality Lucy Ann Lance is scheduled to moderate the panel discussion.

Unnatural Causes examines our nation’s alarming socio-economic and racial disparities in health—and searches for their root causes. Evidence of health inequities are abundant in Washtenaw County, including disparities in infant mortality, mental health and oral health, for example. The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is one of 100 local health departments nationwide that is arranging screenings and discussions around this documentary to promote community awareness and engagement around the issues it raises.

PBS will broadcast *Unnatural Causes* nationally on four evenings beginning in late March (check your local TV listings for specific dates and times). To coincide with the national broadcast of the documentary, screenings of the remaining three segments (Hour Two, Three and Four), followed by community dialogues, will be held at the downtown Ann Arbor District Library (4th floor Meeting Room) on three succeeding weeks (3/20, 3/27 and 4/3 from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.) for interested members of the general public. Each library screening can comfortably accommodate 75-to-100 individuals. Post screening discussions will allow attendees to share thoughts and ideas and will be facilitated by professional health educators from the Washtenaw County Public Health Department.

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Unnatural Causes is divided into four parts:

Hour One: “In Sickness and In Wealth”

What are the connections between healthy bodies and healthy bank accounts? In Louisville, Kentucky, the issues faced by a CEO, a lab supervisor, a janitor, and a welfare mother bring into sharp relief how socio-economic status shapes opportunities to lead healthy lives. People of color face an additional burden. Solutions, public health officials believe, lie not in more pills but in better social policies.

Hour Two: “When the Bough Breaks” and “Becoming American”

Why do African American infant mortality rates remain more than twice as high as white Americans? Researchers are circling in on a provocative hypothesis: the chronic stress of racism can become embedded in African American mothers’ bodies and take a toll on their children even before they leave the womb. In contrast, recent Mexican immigrants, though often poorer, tend to be healthier than the average American. But the longer they live here, the worse their relative health becomes. What’s protective about new immigrant communities that we can all learn from? And what erodes this shield over time?

Hour Three: “Bad Sugar” and “Place Matters”

The O’odham Indians of Arizona suffer one of the highest rates of Type 2 diabetes in the world. But is this due to their genes, or is it part of the body’s response to decades of poverty, oppression and historical trauma? A new approach rooted in the community re-gaining control over its destiny offers hope where medical-only interventions have failed.

Why is your street address such a good predictor of your health? How can your surrounding built and social environment get inside your body like smog and toxic waste? As recent immigrants move into long-neglected African American urban neighborhoods, their health is beginning to deteriorate too. What can be done to create healthy communities?

Hour Four: “Collateral Damage” and “Not Just a Paycheck”

Globalization and the U.S. military have disrupted the lives of Marshall Islanders. Many have ended up in the unlikely place of Springdale, Arkansas where a legacy of poverty and powerlessness continues to take a toll on their bodies.

In western Michigan, a factory closure undermines the lives and health of a white, working class community. But the same company shut down their Swedish plant with hardly a ripple thanks to very different social policies.

Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick? was produced by California Newsreel in association with Vital Pictures, Inc. and is presented by the National Minority Consortia of public television. For more information about *Unnatural Causes*, visit <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>.

The Washtenaw County Public Health Department works locally to prevent disease, promote health, prolong life, and protect communities. One of 45 Local Health Departments in Michigan, the Washtenaw County Public Health Department shares a two-century-old national public mission to enhance sanitary conditions, protect the environment, prevent and control disease, and promote healthy lifestyles—objectives that have resulted in improved quality of life and increased life expectancy for our nation’s citizens. During 2008, the Washtenaw County Public Health Department will be placing a special focus on promoting social justice by reducing inequalities affecting the health of all in Washtenaw County. Learn more about the Health Department at www.ewashtenaw.org.

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