

*The US Department of Transportation estimates that the typical driver will experience a near collision two to three times a month and will be in some type of accident, on average, every six years. For one resident of Altus, Oklahoma, his six years came up. Twenty-year-old Jim Bob Redelsperger lost his life to a driver who failed to stop at a stop sign. He wasn't wearing a seat belt.*

# Oklahoma Turning Point

## Saving Lives in Oklahoma

In Altus, there is no seatbelt law. For three years, the Altus City Council had voted down the ordinance that would require the citizens to buckle up or pay up. The Jackson County Turning Point partnership in Oklahoma decided to bring the matter to the council again, this time armed with the voices of the community in hopes the plight would be better received.

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003, 13 members of the Turning Point partnership brought the seatbelt issue to the Altus City Council meeting.

Six council members listened as Henry Hartsell, chairman of the partnership, reported the increasing traumatic brain injury rate, lost revenue due to low compliance, and shared survey results that declared lack of seatbelt use as one of the riskiest behaviors in the community. Brandie O'Conner, Turning Point representative, spoke about how adopting this simple habit could increase the community's health and safety. Dr. Randy Sheets, a former ER Medical Examiner and member of the partnership, has seen too many kids in his ER from not buckling up. He told the council members, "Kids think they are invincible, and something as simple as a ticket will get them wearing their seatbelt." But nothing seemed to be working. Pencils were tapping, mouths were yawning—the council had heard it all before. Several council members believed that wearing a seat belt was a choice, an issue of personal free-

dom, and they weren't interested in giving up any freedoms tonight.

As things were looking grim, a final member stood to speak. John Redelsperger, Jim Bob's father and a friend of Dr. Sheets, was a respected member of the community. Shortly before the city council meeting, Dr. Sheets had spoken to John about attending the meeting and telling his personal story advocating seatbelt use. John spoke of his 20-year-old son who also once enjoyed personal freedom. He wasn't wearing his seatbelt when he collided with the car that ran the stop sign and was killed



instantly. John told the council that by not wearing his seatbelt, his son "paid the highest price." The other driver walked away from the accident. She was wearing her seatbelt.

On February 18, 2003, the Altus City seat belt ordinance was approved and one month later was officially in effect. Five of the six council members said that after they heard John Redelsperger's story, they changed their minds. His story convinced them to rethink their definition of personal freedom. The Turning Point partnership was successful in their efforts to bring not only community partnerships together, but also community members that are affected by health and safety laws daily. Since the ordinance passed, the rate of motor vehicle fatalities in Jackson County has decreased by 80%, and the personal injury rate has decreased by 15%.

# At a Glance: Oklahoma



## Aim of Oklahoma Turning Point

Oklahoma Turning Point is working to strengthen Oklahoma's public health infrastructure through community-based action in order to respond to the challenge of protecting and improving the public's health in the twenty-first century.

## Oklahoma's Public Health Challenges

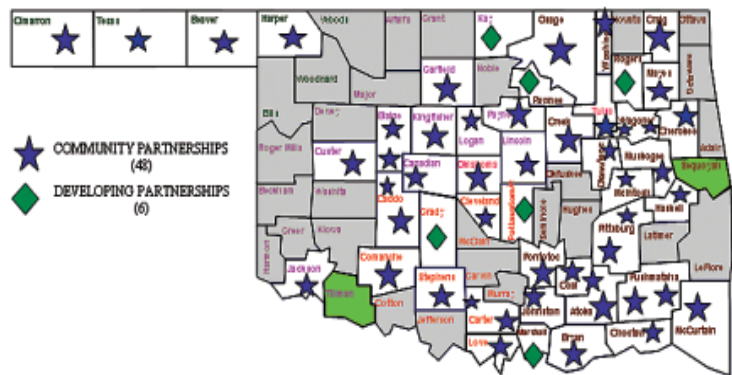
With health departments in 69 of its 77 counties, Oklahoma has one of the best public health infrastructures in the nation. Unfortunately, Oklahoma's public health infrastructure has not resulted in a healthier population. Oklahoma ranks 45<sup>th</sup> in the United Health Foundation 2003 State Health Rankings. Oklahoma ranks among the worst in infectious diseases, death rates, and teenage births. Oklahoma's death rate for heart disease is 21.43%, for cancer 3.33%, for injuries 28.73%, for stroke 14.75%, and for COPD 25.26% higher than the national average. Oklahoma citizens are overburdened with more than their share of disability and unnecessary death. An essential element missing in how public health deals with these problems in Oklahoma is community-based decision making.

## Oklahoma Turning Point's Contribution to Improving Public Health

Turning Point is using innovative means to craft an improved public health system by:

- Using a community-based approach in public health decision making.
- Developing more than 48 local partnerships and working with state partners.
- Increasing cooperation of key state and local partners working toward healthy communities.
- Developing a network of local and state partners to address health-related smoke legislation. Several bills have been passed.
- Developing partnerships with state, county agencies, and communities to assess local public health needs and develop local solutions.
- Working with local partnerships to develop and implement Community Health Improvement Plans.
- Developing resources that will help communities implement population-wide services at the local level, including data access, Internet-based video conferencing, and e-mail policy alerts.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS  
Building Healthy Communities In Oklahoma Through Partnerships



## For More Information

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