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**Steering Committee Kicks off a New Collaboration to Improve the Health of Williamson County**

Community health advocates, doctors, executives, and elected officials held the first of a series of meetings in June, to set new priorities to improve the health of communities throughout Williamson County. The WilCo Wellness Alliance Community Health Improvement Steering Committee will lead a community-wide strategic planning process to improve public health. The Steering Committee will provide executive level leadership for the WilCo Wellness Alliance, a coalition of businesses, schools, health providers, community organizations, non-profits, and local governments. They will identify strategic issues that impact the health of local communities. Steering Committee member and Williamson County Judge Dan Gattis says, “This is the right approach and a bold step. The only way we can maintain a healthy community is if we work together. One city or one hospital cannot do it all.”

The WilCo Wellness Alliance was formed in 2009 when the County was designated as an Action Community for Health, Innovation, and Environmental Change (ACIEVE) by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors. Earlier this year, the Williamson County and Cities Health District (WCCHD), on behalf of the WilCo Wellness Alliance, received a $500,000 grant from Transforming Texas: a statewide initiative to increase access to care, integrate community prevention and clinical services, and eliminate health disparities. As a grant recipient, the Alliance is required to address three strategic issues, including 1) tobacco free living, 2) active living and healthy eating, and 3) high impact, evidence-based clinical and other preventive services, specifically prevention and control of high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Williamson County and Cities Health Director, Dr. Chip Riggins says, “It’s incredible what the coalition has been able to do, in the county, up to this point. With the addition of this steering committee we can expect even greater things because of strong leadership and broad community involvement.”

This August, the WilCo Wellness Alliance Community Health Improvement Steering Committee will hold a workshop that will assess the health status of local communities, the local services that are being provided, and the trends and influences that affect the communities.