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State activists unveil 10-year plan to end domestic violence

BY DAWN BAUMGARTNER VAUGHAN

DURHAM --

The North Carolina 10-Year Plan to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence launched its plan Thursday during a conference of the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence at the Marriott in downtown Durham. The plan was created over three years by a 35-member steering committee including state agencies, the UNC Chapel Hill schools of social work and global public health, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, Family Violence & Rape Crisis Services of Chatham County, N.C. Central University Women's Center and the North Carolina Council for Women.

The plan defines intimate partner violence, or domestic violence, as occurring when a person uses physical violence, sexual violence, threats of violence, psychological, emotional and/or economic abuse, or stalking to establish a pattern of coercive power and control over his or her current or former intimate partner.

In North Carolina, nearly a fifth of homicides are related to intimate partner violence, and half of all female victims are killed by current or former partners. The majority of domestic violence victims are women, but five percent are men. Native American women experience domestic violence at a higher rate than the general population, and low socio-economic status is also associated with higher risk of violence. In 2009, 100 North Carolinians were killed by domestic violence.

The state plan will target people throughout their lives with strategies aimed at parenting skills and relationship norms, education, community engagement and state and local capacity to prevent violence.

One of the pilot sites is Chatham County. Kathy Hodges, co-executive director of the county's Family Violence & Rape Crisis Services, said they are working to help identify the behaviors of power and control they want to eliminate, and respectful and supportive behaviors they want to promote. They have worked with youth, women and men to change community norms.

"Since the beginning of the battered women's movement we have known that if we really want to make the changes we need to increase safety for women and children, we must do nothing short of changing the culture and those supports for the continuation of domestic violence," Hodges said.

Chimi Boyd-Keyes, director of the NCCU Women's Center, said that stopping violence before it begins is the only way to end the epidemic. The highest rate of intimate partner violence is among women between the ages of 16 and 24. A third of victims are college students.

"For many young people, this is their first encounter with a real relationship, and they are unsure as to what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships," Boyd-Keyes said.

The women's center has a men's initiative called Men Creating Change, a campus program of the Washington, D.C.-based Men Can Stop Rape. Male faculty, staff and students meet to determine ways to contribute to preventing intimate partner violence.

Jill Dinwiddie, executive director of the North Carolina Council for Women Domestic Violence Commission said that financial independence plays a role in preventing violence.

"We want girls to grow up feeling the power of the purse and know they don't need a man for validation and economic support," she said. Dinwiddie said that they've established abuser treatment programs but also need to reach girls and young women to teach them that they are in control of their own bodies and health and need to build self-confidence.

Leah Perkinson, prevention specialist for the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said that an eight-year plan was suggested, but they wanted 10 years to "get the ball rolling to change norms, attitudes and beliefs toward violence against women."

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