

# **New documentary series**

## ***Unnatural Causes:***

# ***Is Inequality Making Us Sick?***

***The Forsyth County Healthy Community Coalition is engaging partners throughout our community to help bring this ground-breaking documentary to our neighbors throughout Summer 2008.***

### **The series and the episodes**

**UNNATURAL CAUSES** is a medical detective story out to solve the mystery of what's stalking and killing us before our time, especially those who are less affluent and darker-skinned. The perpetrators aren't individuals but rather societal and institutional forces. And theirs are not impulsive crimes of passion. These are slow deaths—the result of a lifetime of grinding wear and tear, thwarted ambition, segregation and neglect. But this is also a story of hope and possibility, of communities organizing to gain control over their destinies—and their health. The good news is that if bad health comes from policy decisions that we as a society have made, then we can make other decisions. Some countries already have, and they are living longer, fuller lives as a result.

#### **Episode 1: In Sickness and in Wealth (55 minutes)**

The hour-long opening episode is the centerpiece program. This is a story about health, but it's not about doctors or drugs. It's about why some of us get sicker more often and die sooner in the first place. What are the connections between healthy bodies, healthy bank accounts and skin color? How do social policies and the way we organize work and society affect health? Solutions, the show suggests, lie not in more pills but in more equality. Sick of It! sets out the series' main themes: that health and longevity are correlated with socio-economic status, that people of color face an additional health burden, and that our health and well being are tied to policies that promote economic and social justice.

#### **Episode 2: Bad Sugar (25 minutes)**

This episode travels to the O'odham Indian reservations of southern Arizona, which are marked with the dubious distinction of perhaps the highest rates of Type 2 diabetes in the world. There it explores a reconceptualization of chronic disease as the body's response to 'futurelessness' – a condition arising from decades of oppression and historical trauma. It looks at the prospects for a new approach that places a community taking control of its own destiny as fundamental to regaining health.

#### **Episode 3: Place Matters (25 minutes)**

Recent Southeast Asian immigrants, along with Latinos, are moving increasingly into what have been neglected Black urban neighborhoods—and now their health is being eroded too. What policies and investment decisions foster neighborhood environments that harm—or enhance—the health of residents? And what local actions can make a difference?

Unnatural Causes, revised 5-6-08

Lynne Mitchell

For more information, contact 703-3110 or [mitchelm@forsyth.cc](mailto:mitchelm@forsyth.cc)

#### **Episode 4: When The Bough Breaks (25 minutes)**

Infant mortality rates among African Americans remain twice as high as among whites. Black women with graduate degrees still face a greater risk of delivering pre-term, low birth-weight babies than even white women who didn't finish high school. Investigating possible causes, the film circles in on the added burden of racism as a long-term risk factor.

#### **Episode 5: Becoming American (25 minutes)**

Recent Mexican immigrants, though poorer, tend to be healthier than the average American. But the longer they're here, the worse their relative health becomes even as their socioeconomic status improves. This is known as the "Hispanic Paradox." Is there something about life in America that is harmful to health? Conversely, what is protective about new immigrant communities that we can all learn from? Can community and labor organizing reverse the downward trend?

#### **Episode 6: More Than a Paycheck (25 minutes)**

How does employment policy and job insecurity affect our health? Residents of western Michigan struggle against depression, domestic violence and an uptick in heart disease and diabetes when the largest refrigerator factory in the country shuts down. Ironically, the plant is owned by a Swedish company, where shutdowns, far from devastating lives, are relatively benign events – for some even an opportunity – because of Swedish government policies.

#### **Episode 7: Collateral Damage (25 minutes)**

Patterns of uneven development mark the Pacific islands and diabetes, cardiovascular and kidney diseases, even tuberculosis, are taking a growing toll on Pacific Islander populations. In the Marshall Islands and in the unlikely spot of Springdale, Arkansas we can see how U.S. occupation, military policy and globalization impact people's health--often in unanticipated ways.

**To schedule a screening of one segment or the entire series in the Winston-Salem area and arrange to check out a DVD, contact:**

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***Unnatural Causes* is a four-hour documentary series produced by California Newsreel with Vital Pictures, Inc. Presented for PBS broadcast by the National Minority Consortia of Public Television. Public Impact Campaign in association with the Joint Center Health Policy Institute.**

**For more information about the series, including purchasing details, go to [www.unnaturalcauses.org](http://www.unnaturalcauses.org)**

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