

Women key to overall health: ex-first lady

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GRAND CHUTE -- Good mental and physical health "all begins with a healthy woman," says former Wisconsin first lady Sue Ann Thompson. That's because women make more than 85 percent of the health care decisions for their families and spend four of every five health care dollars, according to Thompson, the featured speaker Wednesday at a women's health panel sponsored by the **Women's Fund** Community Foundation.

"As the primary caregiver in the family, (women) have an undeniable influence on the family's lifestyle, especially on nutrition, which is an essential part of disease prevention," said Thompson, who spoke to a crowd of about 40 women at the Girl Scout Program Center. "So when we're talking about women's health, we're really talking about family health."

The panel was convened to discuss women's health issues in response to the "Status of Women in Wisconsin," a report by the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Women's Policy Research, which gave the state a C-plus on women's health issues.

Thompson is the president and director of the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, which she founded in 1997. The nonprofit group works to educate women on important health topics, encourage women to be advocates for their own health, and improve the overall quality of life for women and their families.

To improve the status of Wisconsin women, Thompson said the state and its residents need to work to expand the definition of women's health, invest in women's health research, get information in the hands of all women and teach women to become better advocates for themselves.

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