

https://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/state-officials-indiana-healthy-economically-physically-not-so-much/article_74100724-499c-5144-9aad-771d49028feb.html

URGENT

State officials: Indiana healthy economically, physically not so much

Giles Bruce giles.bruce@nwi.com, 219-853-2584 Nov 10, 2018

TRY 1 MONTH FOR 99¢



Dr. Kristina Box, the state health commissioner for Indiana, speaks at the "Women of the Present" event in Hobart.



Why do so many babies die in Indiana?



East Chicago long has led Indiana in babies dying

Northwest Indiana students encouraged to be 'kings,' 'queens' and 'superheroes' at anti-violence conference

Northwest Indiana students encouraged to be 'kings,' 'queens' and 'superheroes' at anti-violence conference



HOBART — The leaders of two state agencies spoke here Friday about the physical and economic health of Indiana. They delivered two very different messages.

Dr. Kristina Box, the state health commissioner, noted that Indiana is one of the unhealthiest states in the nation, due to its struggles with things like obesity, smoking and substance abuse.

She noted that 1,700 Hoosiers died from drug overdoses last year, a 500 percent increase since 1999. "These are our neighbors, our aunts, our uncles, our friends," she said to about 60 people attending a women's mental health luncheon hosted by the Indiana Parenting Institute at Avalon Manor.

She said the state has promised, by the end of 2019, to have outpatient treatment available within an hour of every Hoosier.

She also pointed out that Indiana has the seventh-highest infant mortality rate in the nation, with more than 600 Hoosier babies dying in 2016 (the ZIP code with Indiana's highest infant death rate is in East Chicago).

Gov. Eric Holcomb has pledged that Indiana would have the lowest infant mortality rate in the Midwest — it currently has the highest — by

Officials probe
problem of alarming
infant death rate in
NWI

2024, she said.

Box said this can be done by making sure women are healthy before they conceive — that they have good nutrition, control any chronic illnesses, don't use drugs or alcohol — and that babies always sleep alone, on their backs, in cribs. Other solutions include ensuring women can obtain prenatal care and any needed substance abuse and mental health treatment, she said.

But Elaine Bedel, president of the Indiana Economic Development Corp., said the state is healthy in one way: economically. She said Indiana has been named the No. 1 state to do business in the Midwest and fifth overall.

She noted that next-door Illinois has higher income, corporate, property and unemployment taxes, influencing companies to cross the border.

"There is a little benefit of being next to Illinois right now," she said. "Things aren't going swimmingly for them."

She pointed to some economic-development wins in Northwest Indiana recently, aided in part by tax incentives from the state: a \$750 million investment from U.S. Steel in Gary; a \$40 million data center in Hammond; a \$7.5 million bioscience pig farm in Rensselaer.

And she predicted that the long-

discussed expansion of the South Shore Line is "going to happen."

She said the quick ride to Chicago from the Region will attract people who want to live close to a big city but like Indiana's low cost of living.

"It's going to be huge," she said. "It's going to get so much more economic development here."

Giles Bruce

Health Reporter

Giles is the health reporter for The Times, covering the business of health care as well as consumer and public health. He previously wrote about health for the Lawrence (Kansas) Journal-World. He is a graduate of Northern Illinois University.