

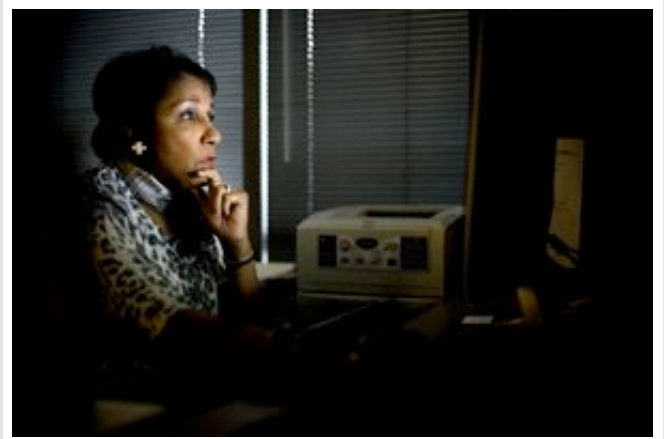
## Common Table's Frazier Takes Business of Healthy City Seriously

Friday, January 29, 2010, Vol. 125, No. 19  
TOM WILEMON | The Daily News

One year into the job as executive director of Healthy Memphis Common Table, [Renee Frazier](#) has mapped out a “take charge” agenda.

She's not trying to be everybody's boss. Rather, her aim is for people to “take charge” in transforming Memphis into one of the nation's healthiest cities.

“Take charge” is the catch phrase on the nonprofit organization's Web site, [www.healthymemphis.org](http://www.healthymemphis.org). A click on the phrase links users to a plethora of information, ranging from a guide on walkable neighborhoods to a patient-based rating system for doctors.



Frazier

Photo: Christopher Parks

“The Common Table intends to be a catalyst,” Frazier said. “We are seen as the organization that is trying to build the will of the community to change. We have a lot of community partners that are helping us try to do that. We basically work with other organizations that have a similar vision toward trying to improve the health of the city. We certainly are not doing this alone.”

### Reaching for the healthy stars

Frazier came to Memphis from the Northeast in January 2009 to lead the Healthy Memphis Common Table. She previously spent years working in the health care industry, holding executive positions at VHA Pennsylvania, BlueCrossBlueShield of [Maryland, Liberty Medical Center and Lutheran Health Care Corp.](#)

She came to Memphis knowing the city has some of the highest obesity, diabetes and infant mortality rates in the nation.

“We established a new vision to become one of America's healthiest cities, which is pretty bold,” she said. “It's lofty, but you have to reach for the stars. You got to. You have to. We're not even on the list of America's healthiest cities, but we've been doing a gap analysis. There's no reason we shouldn't strive to get there.”

Cities with similar demographics, such as New Orleans and Washington, have made the list in the past, she said, so Memphis can too.

During her first year at the nonprofit organization, she focused on building awareness.

“The first thing we've done is repositioned our brand, showing people who we are and what we

stand for,” Frazier said. “I think that’s been a huge accomplishment for us. You have to realize I came in a year ago into this organization that was a volunteer organization so I had to really focus on the basics. I’m hoping that year two will be even more productive.”

## **Survey says ...**

One accomplishment during 2009 was the completion of a survey of patients about physicians done in conjunction with the Consumers’ Checkbook/The Center for the Study of Services. Memphis was one of three cities to conduct such a survey.

Thirty-five percent of the 50,000 people conducted for the survey participated. The survey was done in late 2009, but the results are already up on the Web site for Healthy Memphis Common Table. The Web site also has other comparative information about health care resources.

“Right now, health care is very unzipped,” Frazier said. “The thing that the Common Table is going to be able to do with some of these quality indicators is unzip health care. So that’s a very important role we’re going to play.”

It is up to individuals to make healthy choices, though. One goal is to establish aid for people with diabetes to better manage their health.

However, prevention is a top aim. Frazier said she is alarmed when she hears doctors talk about instances of obesity and diabetes in children.

Frazier believes community gardens are a good starting point with preventive efforts. She doubts that a small garden plot in an urban landscape will yield enough to feed an entire neighborhood, but it could cause more people to crave fresh vegetables.

“I think it creates a different attitude in terms of what one can do differently,” she said. “It also may create some leverage in conversation around bringing food into the community that’s more healthful. ... It’s a stepping stone to something else.”

One idea she would like to see implemented in Memphis is a mobile farmers’ market that would bring fresh vegetables to inner-city neighborhoods.

Frazier said she looks forward to working with other community partners to make Memphis a healthier place.

“You are going to see more neighborhood outreach,” she said. “You are going to see us taking on environmental issues that impact change. You are going to see us promote our quality agenda in trying to engage consumers more around understanding what health care quality is and how they can make decisions based on information.

“You are going to see a lot of activity on multiple fronts. I’m going to be a pretty busy lady in 2010.”