

Southwestern Vermont Health Care Community Health Needs Assessment Annual Implementation Report Update 2018

Southwestern Vermont Health Care

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Executive Summary

Southwestern Vermont Health Care (SVHC) consisting of Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) and Centers for Living and Rehabilitation (CLR) conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to:

- Determine the most pressing healthcare needs of the communities we serve
- Develop a comprehensive, multi-year implementation plan to address the identified concerns

This process involved quantitative data gathering and analysis, and qualitative input from community leaders who represent the broad interests of the communities SVHC serves throughout the region. The community leaders included members from the Department of Health, schools, and community groups that had knowledge of the medically underserved, low income and minority populations in our region.



SVHC's service area was defined as counties housing communities from which originated >1% of SVHC's total inpatient and outpatient volume, including;

- Bennington County, Vermont
- Windham County, Vermont
- Rensselaer County, New York
- Washington County, New York
- Northern Berkshire County, Massachusetts

After cataloguing prevalent health needs and reviewing quantitative and qualitative data, focus groups used a structured voting method to prioritize the final list of the most pressing community health needs.

The priority health needs identified for the SVHC service region are:

- **Access to Care**
 - Improve primary care access and dental care availability
 - Increase dental care availability
 - Increase awareness of senior care and end-of-life care options (at-home, hospice, and palliative care)
- **Obesity and Healthy Behaviors**
 - Enhance health and wellness programs
 - Foster links between good health, nutrition, exercise and community development
- **Mental and Behavioral Health and Addiction**
 - Expand substance abuse prevention and treatment options
 - Develop youth stress management and coping program

The priority health needs identified in 2015 were similar to those identified in SVHC's 2012 CHNA, suggesting the need for a focused implementation plan based on best-practice. SVHC is mid-process in conducting its three year annual assessment which will be completed in July, 2018.

Evidence indicates that addressing broad health needs requires both:

- specific programs targeting the needs
- public policy changes that affect the physical and social landscape of communities¹

The implementation plan developed to address the identified health needs leverages current understanding of the social determinants of health and considers both national healthcare reform and state initiatives refocusing healthcare delivery on population health.

The Causes of Poor Health

A large body of research indicates that the most effective means of improving community health is to address underlying social and economic determinants, or root causes of health issues. This approach is corroborated by the World Health Organization's position, "the social determinants of health are the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics."

The socio-economic determinants of population health include:

- **Income** – Income is closely linked with differences in health. Research shows that those who have greater economic opportunity typically have better health.
- **Education** – Educational levels are strongly linked with differences in health. People with some college or post-high-school education have a longer life expectancy, less chronic disease (diabetes and heart disease) and greater general health than those with less education.
- **Physical Environment** – The physical environment we live in plays a large role in determining health outcomes. Our ability to walk safely, access recreational opportunities, conveniently find nutritional food options, access affordable quality homes, limit contaminants in our homes, and a host of other environmental factors directly impact our health and the overall health of a community.
- **Public Policy** – Legislation to provide access to health care providers, minimum wage requirements, state Medicaid and Medicare programs and funding for key health related programs have measurable effects on public health.
- **Social Policy** – Local laws, ordinances and policies like nutritional standards for school menus, smoking bans in the workplace, tax-based support for afterschool programs, access to quality child care and municipal funding for sidewalks and parks are just a few of the many local activities which can have effect on the overall health of a community.

Weaving community policy initiatives together with programmatic activities is the key to improving the health needs identified by SVHC's assessment and are central to the implementation plan.

¹ World Health Organization:

http://www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/finalreport/key_concepts/en/index.html (accessed 05/2015)

SVHC Implementation Plan to Address Health Needs

In 2015 SVHC developed a comprehensive implementation plan to address priority health needs. This plan spans the health system and leverages community collaborators to resolve both programmatic and policy barriers. The activities in the plan fall into several themes outlined below and some of the progress within each theme is described.

Access to Care

- Free and Subsidized Care – SVHC continues to provide free and reduced health care services for those who do not have insurance or are underinsured. These efforts are bolstered by the dedication of staff in the Financial Counselling & Assistance and Social Services Departments who help individuals enroll in federal and state programs that can help pay for the care they need.
- Primary Care Access Initiatives – SVMC has continued to recruit primary care providers and expand primary care offerings across the region, including building new access points and facilities, renovating existing facilities, extending hours of operations and streamlining processes to increase the capacity to see more patients. Since completing the Community Health Needs Assessment in 2015, SVMC has added 6 primary care physicians and 9 associate providers (physician assistants and nurse practitioners).
- Bennington Free Clinic Support – SVHC continues to provide grant support for the community care provided by the Bennington Free Clinic. In addition, SVMC subsidizes any care needed at SVMC by patients of the Bennington Free Clinic (ex. laboratory tests, imaging studies, etc.).
- Dental Clinic Development – SVMC launched its dental clinic in January, 2018. SVMC Dentistry is currently serving more than 30 clients per day, most of which are Medicaid and children.
- Senior Care, At-Home Care, and End-of-Life Initiatives – SVMC has enhanced its hospice and palliative care offerings by extending its programs to be community directed and collaborative with other community organizations. Recently the palliative care program was linked to the cancer center to better serve that population.

Obesity and Healthy Behaviors

- Community Building and Economic Development
 - AmeriCorps VISTA – SVMC continues to grant Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) funds to manage three AmeriCorps VISTA fellows focused on transforming the community and addressing poverty. The VISTA fellows will implement programs that support community development, improve health, and address poverty in the region. SVMC's director of planning directly oversees one of the VISTA fellows.
 - Economic Partners – SVMC staff participate in a wide array of task forces and initiatives to enhance the region's economic standings including the Southern Vermont Economic Development Zone and regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) process. Also, effort and funds are committed to enhance entrepreneurship through The Lightning Jar and support the Idea Fund (Bennington-based micro-grant program).
 - Educational Systems – SVMC continues to collaborate with local schools and colleges to set a new vision that transforms educational attainment and college/career readiness. SVMC is a key participant in a broad array of school based programs that range from expanding healthy food choices to encouraging physical activity at school.

- Healthy Home Ownership Program – SVMC has purchase and rehabilitated 4 distressed and abandoned downtown homes and is in the process of facilitating home ownership by SVHC employees.
- Putnam Development Group – SVMC is a lead investor and participant in the redevelopment of a 5 acre downtown blighted property. The development will cost in excess of \$50,000,000 and has galvanized the local institutions (Southern Vermont College, Bennington College, Bank of Bennington and many others) to collaborate on revitalizing Bennington’s downtown.
- Health and Wellness Programs – Expand current health and wellness programs offered by SVHC, while also implementing new programs across the service region that address priority needs.
 - Direct health and wellness initiatives include:
 - Tobacco cessation program
 - Diabetes management education
 - Health Care Share (healthy food access and nutrition education for patients)
 - Walking and physical activity initiatives across neighborhoods
- Walking Trail – Maintain a three-quarter of a mile walking trail on the SVMC Bennington Campus open to employees and the public. Provide financial support to complete a bike trail between critical neighborhoods and a nearby elementary school.
- Community Events Sponsorship – Financially support and participate in community events such as wellness fairs, cancer screening events and community building events such as the American Cancer Society Relay for Life and Vermont Race for the Cure.

Mental and Behavioral Health and Addiction

- Substance Abuse Treatment Collaboration – SVMC, together with local providers and the designated mental health agency, sustained an opioid addiction treatment program.
- Catalyst- SVMC participates in this neighborhood based program to reduce crime, substance abuse, and school truancy. Activities include participating in a planning both social and infrastructure improvements to downtown neighborhoods.
- Drug Take-back Box – SVMC has installed a secure drug take-back receptacle in its main hospital lobby to facilitate removal of harmful unused medications from community circulation.
- Youth mentoring program – SVMC launched a teen life hacks texting platform that provides weekly positive messages to youth via text message. SVMC also supported several youth attending the Governors Institute for specialized educational programming.

Each of the initiatives is multidimensional and supports multiple priority health needs. For example, the support for the Bennington Free Clinic increases access to quality primary care. However, because a disproportionate percentage of the patients served also struggle with behavioral health issues and substance abuse, the efforts of the Bennington Free Clinic care givers also addresses those priority health needs. Similarly, the SVMC walking trail encourages exercise to reduce obesity, it also improves mental resilience through stress management and building social relationships.

The chart below illustrates how these initiatives knit a coordinated and comprehensive response to the priority health needs.

	Access to Care			Obesity and Healthy Behaviors		Mental Health & Addiction	
	Primary Care	Dental Care	Senior Care	Health & Wellness	Community Development	Substance Abuse	Youth Stress Management
Free and Subsidized Care	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Primary Care Access Initiatives	x		x	x	x	x	
Bennington Free Clinic Support	x		x	x		x	x
Dental Clinical Development		x	x	x	x		
Senior Care Initiatives	x	x	x	x		x	
Community Building and Economic Development				x	x	x	x
AmeriCorps VISTA Fellows				x	x		x
Economic Partners Participation				x	x		
Educational Systems Improvement				x	x	x	x
Healthy Home Ownership Program				x	x	x	x
Health and Wellness Programs				x	x	x	x
Tobacco Cessation Program				x		x	
Yoga Classes				x			x
Health Care Share (healthy food access for patients)				x	x		
Youth Stress Management/Mentoring Program				x	x	x	x
Healthy Nutrition and Cooking Classes				x	x		
Oral Health Skills Building		x		x			
Reproductive Health Education				x			x
Walking and Physical Activity Initiatives				x	x	x	x
SVMC Walking Trail				x	x	x	x
Tranportation Collaborative	x	x	x	x	x		
Community Event Sponsorship				x	x	x	x
Substance Abuse Treatment Collaboration				x		x	x
Catalyst					x	x	x
Youth Mentoring Program				x		x	x

SVHC cannot address these priority health needs and improve community health alone. Continuing to foster collaboration with local organizations and engagement with municipalities and community leaders is key to achieving success. The health of the communities served by SVHC will improve as we deploy the multi-year implementation plan that includes both programmatic and policy initiatives.

Report Dissemination

The report will also be made available to the public as a PDF file from the institutional web page (<http://svhealthcare.org>, as 2018 implementation report update). Members of the public can also request a print copy of this report by contacting James Trimarchi via e-mail (james.trimarchi@svhealthcare.org) or phone (802.440.4051).