

# Washington County Health Needs Assessment



A summary of key informant interviews

2014

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## Introduction

This report presents a summary of public health priorities for Washington County, as identified in 2014 by a range of providers, policy-makers, and other local experts and community members (“key informants”). These findings are a critical supplement to the Washington County Community Health Survey conducted through a partnership between Aurora Health Care, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, Columbia St. Mary’s Health System, Froedtert Health, and Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare. The key informant interviews incorporate input from persons representing the broad interests of the community served, and from those who possess special knowledge of or expertise in public health.

Key informants in Washington County were identified by the five organizations listed above. Aurora Health Care and Froedtert Health invited the informants to participate, and conducted the interviews from June - August 2014. The interviewers used a standard interview script that included the following elements:

- Ranking of up to five public health issues, based on the focus areas presented in Wisconsin’s State Health Plan, that are the most important issues for the County; and
- For those five public health issues:
  - Existing strategies to address the issue
  - Barriers/challenges to addressing the issue
  - Additional strategies needed
  - Key groups in the community that hospitals should partner with to improve community health

All informants were made aware that participation was voluntary and that responses would be shared with the Center for Urban Population Health for analysis and reporting. Based on the information provided to the Center for Urban Population Health, this report presents the results of the 2014 key informant interviews for Washington County.

The report first presents a summary of the health issue rankings, including a list of the five issues which were ranked most frequently by respondents. The next section describes the themes that presented themselves across the top ranked health topics. Finally, a summary of the strategies, barriers, and partners described by participants is provided as well.

**Limitations:** Fifteen key informant interviews were conducted in Washington County. The report relies on the opinions and experiences of a limited number of experts identified as having the community’s pulse. However, responses may not be representative of the overall perception of community strengths and needs. It is possible that the results would have been substantially different if a different set of

informants had been interviewed. Results should be interpreted with caution and in conjunction with other Washington County data (e.g., community health surveys and secondary data reports).

## A. Focus Area Ranking

A total of 15 key informants were asked to rank up to 5 of the major health-related issues in their county from a list of 13 focus areas identified in the State Health Plan. (See Appendix A for the full list of informants). The table below presents the results, including a summary of the number of times an issue was mentioned as a top five health issue, and the number of times an informant ranked the issue as the most important health issue. Importantly, not every informant ranked five issues (key informants identified between one and six issues).

| <b>Focus Area</b>              | <b># Key Informants Ranking Issue Among Top 5 Health Issues</b> | <b># Key Informants Who Ranked Health Issue as the Top (#1) Priority</b> |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Alcohol and Drug               | 13  | 7  |
| Chronic Disease                | 4   | 1  |
| Communicable Disease           | 0   | 0  |
| Environmental and Occupational | 1   | 0  |
| Growth and Development         | 1   | 0  |
| Mental Health                  | 12  | 3  |
| Nutrition                      | 9   | 2  |
| Oral Health                    | 3   | 1  |
| Physical Activity              | 7   | 1  |
| Reproductive and Sexual        | 0   | 0  |
| Tobacco                        | 2   | 0  |
| Access                         | 3   | 0  |
| Injury and Violence            | 4   | 0  |

## B. Top Five Health Issues

The five health issues ranked most consistently as a top five health issue for the County were:

1. Alcohol and Drug
2. Mental Health
3. Nutrition
4. Physical Activity
5. Tie – Chronic Disease and Injury and Violence

Summaries of themes for each issue are presented below in the order listed in the table above. As a guide, issues ranked as the top five priorities for the County are marked with this thermometer symbol:



### C. General Themes

A wide variety of organizations are currently working to address the majority of the top ranked health issues in Washington County. Many organizations and initiatives are currently involved in prevention, promotion and treatment efforts, including local schools, the YMCA, the Healthy People Project, the Washington County Planning and Parks Department, the Injury Prevention Coalition, and the Heroin Task Force.

A lack of knowledge of existing community resources and a lack of funding to create programs to help address these highly ranked health issues were identified as critical challenges in the County. Limited personal financial resources and difficulties accessing services were noted as pressing challenges as well. In addition, cultural norms, personal lifestyle choices, and finding time to prepare healthy food and exercise were stated as barriers to combating the key health issues.

Increased collaboration between the community and key stakeholders, between private and public sectors, and among health care providers was emphasized for nearly all of the top ranked health issues. In addition, educational efforts and awareness campaigns are needed for all ages and across all segments of the population for alcohol and drug, nutrition, physical activity, and injury and violence related issues.

The complexity of the top ranked health issues cannot be successfully remedied without the collaboration and coordination of efforts across agencies. Respondents consistently noted the importance of health care providers, schools, faith-based institutions, law enforcement officials, Washington County Mental Health, and Washington County's Health and Planning and Parks Departments all working together. In particular, the YMCA was frequently mentioned as a stakeholder, pointing to its potential as a key partner in addressing many of these inter-related health issues.

### D. Issue Summaries



#### **Alcohol and Drug**

Thirteen key informants included Alcohol and Drug abuse as a top five health issue.

*Existing Strategies:* Local law enforcement and detox efforts, along with educational efforts in schools, were frequently reported as existing strategies. The Heroin Task Force, Every 15 Minutes Program, Genesis, and Elevate, Inc. were also identified as initiatives and organizations working to address alcohol and drug issues in the County.

*Barriers and Challenges:* The general cultural acceptance of drinking in the State, and the easy accessibility of alcohol and other substances by youth are main barriers faced in the County. The lack of funding for the creation of programs to address these issues, the lack of alignment of services among providers, and the lack of understanding of available resources were also named as barriers. Participants also noted that accessing treatment and services is a challenge.

*Needed Strategies:* Key informants suggested an increase in prevention education on alcohol and drug usage, specifically focusing on youth. Increased funding directed towards prevention efforts and improving awareness are additional needed strategies. Creating a cultural shift regarding norms around alcohol and drug usage is also key. A number of respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration between the community and key stakeholders, and increasing access to care within the County.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be working with health care providers such as primary care providers, specialists, private clinics, and other hospitals like Aurora and Froedtert. School districts, faith-based groups, police departments, and the Washington County Health Department are key partners as well. Specific organizations mentioned as potential allies included Elevate, Inc., United Way, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and the YMCA.



### **Chronic Disease**

Four informants included Chronic Disease in their top health issues for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* Programs offered at the YMCA, such as the Diabetes Prevention Program, along with other community programs geared towards smoking cessation and self-management of disease, are existing strategies in place to combat chronic disease. The Healthy People Project and the American Heart Association efforts are influential as well.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Main barriers include a lack of awareness of what services and programs exist for community members facing chronic illnesses. Health care services currently focus on treating patients after they fall ill, rather than emphasizing prevention, which is another challenge in improving chronic health issues.

*Needed Strategies:* Improved collaboration among health care providers was heavily emphasized. An increase in prevention efforts, bilingual programming, and access to Electronic Medical Records are necessary as well.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with health care providers such as alternative medicine practitioners, public health professionals, and institutions such as the Albrecht Free Clinic. Schools, the YMCA, and Aurora’s rehabilitation services programs were also noted.

### **Communicable Disease**

Communicable Disease was not ranked as one of the top health related priorities for the County. Neither strategies, barriers nor key partners were described.

### **Environmental and Occupational**

One informant ranked Environmental and Occupational Health as a top health issue for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was listed as an existing strategy.

*Barriers and Challenges:* OSHA does not have the capacity to oversee all operating facilities, and therefore often focuses on larger facilities. This creates a barrier for improving environmental and occupational health across the County.

*Needed Strategies:* Increased education and the encouragement of smaller companies to join the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC) Association.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with state and federal institutions.

### **Growth and Development**

Growth and Development was ranked as a top health issue by one key informant.

*Existing Strategies:* No existing strategies were identified.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Barriers include social norms and values, navigating resources, and drug usage among kids.



*Needed Strategies:* Increasing education and prevention efforts in schools, improving awareness of healthy behaviors, and increasing mentorship programs were all identified as necessary strategies.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with schools, faith-based groups, and government leaders.



## **Mental Health**

Twelve respondents ranked Mental Health as a top health issue for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* Numerous participants mentioned that robust mental health services are offered at the county level, including Washington County Acute Care Services. A number of Washington County Task Forces also work to address this issue, such as the Mental Health Task Force and the Heroin Task Force. The Injury Prevention Coalition, Calm Harbor, NAMI, and educational institutions also offer programs to address the mental health issues of the County.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Although there are many existing strategies in place, the barriers that exist within the County reduce their effectiveness. The denial and stigma associated with mental health, the lack of funding for mental health programs and services, and confidentiality policies involved with mental health care are main barriers in addressing this health issue. Respondents also emphasized that individuals have difficulties navigating the resources offered in the County, and accessing services due to being uninsured or underinsured. In particular, it was noted that Medicaid and Medicare populations have challenges accessing services.

*Needed Strategies:* Additional strategies necessary to address the issue include reducing the stigma associated with mental health, increasing the number of counselors and services available to those in need, and in investing in schools as a potential venue for youth-based mental health resources. Focusing on creating treatment options that do not involve medications was also mentioned. Lastly, respondents advocated for the need of improved collaboration among the public and private sectors.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with health care providers such as AODA and treatment providers, other hospitals and clinics, and the Washington County Health Department. The Mental Health Task Force, Community Health Coalition, and Washington County Mental Health were listed as key partners as well. Schools, faith-based institutions, law enforcement officials, and organizations such as United Way, NAMI, and Elevate are also allies in addressing mental health issues.



## **Nutrition**

Nine respondents included Nutrition as a top health issue for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* The Healthy People Project, Fit Kids Fit Families program, and other educational programs offered by Aurora and Froedtert are all existing strategies to address nutrition issues. UW-Extension and the Washington County Planning and Parks Department also focus on nutrition issues. Efforts in schools to create more nutritious meals are taking place, and community gardens are increasing as well.

*Barriers and Challenges:* The cost of healthy foods and the abundance of cheaper fast food in the County is a barrier to healthy eating. Highly processed foods are easily accessible whereas fresh fruits and vegetables are not. A lack of time in people's personal lives, and a lack of dietitians and nutrition coaches were also cited as barriers for individuals making healthier food choices. Difficulty in successfully navigating and comprehending food labels is also a challenge.

*Needed Strategies:* Increasing education on healthy eating and meal planning is key. Collaboration among organizations such as local health and wellness venues to promote nutrition and diet information to the community is also necessary. Some participants suggested taxing the food industry on foods with poor nutritional value, and advocating heart healthy vending machine options.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with schools, fitness centers, grocery stores, the Washington County Planning and Parks Department, the Washington County Health Department, and other organizations such as Pete's Fruit Market and Casa Guadalupe Education Center, Inc.

## **Oral Health**

Three key informants included Oral Health as a top health issue for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* Respondents emphasized the Head Start Program and a dental voucher program offered through the Albrecht Free Clinic.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Despite these resources, participants felt that finding an adequate number of dentists who work with clients on Medicaid or Medicare is a major barrier. Uninsured individuals sometimes use Emergency Room services for dental care (which is costly), and may lack adequate and reliable transportation to and from dental services.

*Needed Strategies:* Respondents commented that increasing collaboration among dental institutions could help address this issue. Advocating preventative dentistry and services offered by the Albrecht Free Clinic is also key. Another strategy that participants identified was to increase transportation services to appointments.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with the Albrecht Free Clinic, local dentists and dental associations, and the Washington County Health Department.



### **Physical Activity**

Seven key informants included Physical Activity as a top health issue for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* Fitness facilities such as the YMCA and SNAP Fitness, the Washington County Planning and Parks Department, the Healthy People Project, walking groups, and non-competitive sports leagues were all noted as existing strategies for addressing physical activity issues.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Participants discussed that people's time, priorities, and lifestyle choices were main barriers against improving physical activity levels in the County. A lack of financial resources and walking and biking trails are also a challenge.

*Needed Strategies:* Overall, many participants felt more education was needed for community members regarding the importance of physical activity. Increasing the number of bike paths, promoting active transportation, and getting entire families involved in regular exercise was mentioned as well. One participant suggested that public transit systems should be promoted and that bike racks should be incorporated onto busses.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with the YMCA, UW-Extension, the Healthy People Project, schools, GE Healthcare and other local businesses, health care providers, the Washington County Planning and Parks Department, and the federal and state governments.

### **Reproductive and Sexual Health**

Reproductive and Sexual Health was not ranked as one of the top health related priorities for the County. Neither strategies, barriers nor key partners were described.

### **Tobacco**

Two key informants included Tobacco as a top health priority for the County.

*Existing Strategies:* Education surrounding tobacco use and decreasing the amount of tobacco-related advertisements are current strategies being implemented in the County.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Main barriers include tobacco companies targeting youth populations, and the acceptance of tobacco use in society.

*Needed Strategies:* Education in schools exploring the dangers of tobacco use was heavily emphasized. Re-implementing or strengthening the DARE program in schools is also a potential strategy.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with school districts to address issues of tobacco use in the County.

## **Access**

Access was ranked as a top five health issue by three key informants.

*Existing Strategies:* Existing strategies included organizations and initiatives such as the Hartford Resource Center, United Way, churches, St. Vincent de Paul, hospitals, the County Crisis Line, and Impact 211.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Participants identified a lack of awareness and ability to successfully navigate health care services among community members, along with a lack of health insurance, limited coverage, and high deductibles as main barriers in accessing care. One participant noted that the “capacity to collaborate on serious community access issues and assess the root cause” is also a challenge.

*Needed Strategies:* Workforce development and increased collaboration among non-profits and community organizations is key. Creating more long-term care services and counseling services is also important.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with local schools, churches, United Way, for profit and non-profit organizations, Washington County Human Services, and the Washington County Health Department.



## **Injury and Violence**

Injury and Violence was ranked as a top five health issue by four key informants.

*Existing Strategies:* The Injury Prevention Coalition, Friends of Abused Families, Inc., car seat fitting stations, and helmet fitting initiatives are current strategies being used to address issues of injury and violence.

*Barriers and Challenges:* Main challenges include a strong correlation between alcohol and drug abuse and injury and violence incidents, the cultural norms of the region, and drinking and driving.

*Needed Strategies:* Participants felt that there needs to be increased awareness among community members about the cycle of abuse. Youth prevention efforts and the promotion of seat belt usage (particularly among high school students) are also necessary.

*Key Community Partners to Improve Health:* Hospitals should be partnering with law enforcement officials, Friends of Abused Families, Inc., churches, school districts, and with Washington County Mental Health.

## Appendix A

### Washington County Key Informants

| Name                                  | Title                                     | Organization  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Heidi Anderson <sup>††</sup>          | Parish Nurse                              | Aurora Health Care Parish Nurse Program/Still Waters Community United |
| Kristen Brandner <sup>†, †††</sup>    | Executive Director                        | United Way Washington County  |
| Noelle Braun <sup>†, ††, †††</sup>    | Executive Director                        | Casa Guadalupe Education Center                                       |
| Justin Casperson <sup>†, †††</sup>    | Park & Recreation Director                | Germantown Rec. Dept.   |
| Deacon Jim Chrisien <sup>†</sup>      | Director                                  | St. Boniface Food Pantry  |
| Eric Diamond <sup>†, ††, †††</sup>    | Behavioral Health Manager                 | Washington County Mental Health                                       |
| Craig Farrell                         | Executive Director                        | West Bend Chamber of Commerce   |
| Mike Hermann, CPRP <sup>†</sup>       | Director                                  | Hartford Parks & Recreation   |
| Pete Hoell, BS <sup>†, ††, †††</sup>  | Chief                                     | Germantown Police Department  |
| Sharon Kailas <sup>†, ††, †††</sup>   | Director Pupil Services                   | West Bend School District   |
| Marc Lehnerer <sup>†, ††, †††</sup>   | Assistant Principal                       | Germantown High School  |
| Aaron Schmidt                         | Associate Executive Director              | Kettle Moraine YMCA   |
| Mary Simon                            | Executive Director                        | Elevate Inc   |
| Jim Strachota <sup>†, ††, †††</sup>   | Executive Director                        | Albrecht Free Clinic  |
| Joni Whitehouse <sup>†, ††, †††</sup> | Assistant Director/Interim Health Officer | Washington County Health Department                                   |

**†** Denotes this individual's position/organization represents low-income populations

**††** Denotes this individual's position/organization represents medically underserved populations

**†††** Denotes this individual's position/organization represents minority populations