

2008 Capital Region Health Needs Assessment Findings

Access to affordable dental care

Access to affordable dental care is a priority health need in the Concord Region.

Many respondents reported a need for dental care.

In the online survey, when respondents were asked to identify the health service that they and their family have needed most in the past year, the majority (61%) identified *dental care*. In addition, in the written survey, 44 percent of adults and 24 percent of teens identified *dental care* as the health service that they have needed most in the past month. These results suggest that there is a relatively pervasive need for dental care among residents in the Concord region.

Dental care is a commonly unmet need among residents in the Concord region.

The research indicates that dental care is not only a relatively pervasive health need within the Concord region, but that it is also one of the most common unmet needs. According to the telephone survey, dental care is the most common unmet need among both adults (11%) and children (5%). Eleven percent of respondent households contain at least one adult who needs routine dental care (6%) or dental care for a tooth problem (5%) but cannot obtain the care. In addition, five percent of respondent households contain at least one child who needs routine dental care (4%) or dental care for a tooth problem (1%) but cannot obtain the care. The online survey results are consistent with these findings, showing that dental care is tied with medical check-ups for the second most frequently mentioned health service that online respondents (5%) said that they and their families needed but are unable to access. Among those online respondents who indicated that they were able to access dental care, eight percent said that they did not receive it in a timely manner. These results suggest that there is a relatively strong need for improved dental care in the Concord region.

There is a widely held perception among respondents that dental care is one of their community's most important health need.

The research also indicates that dental care is a commonly perceived community need. In the telephone survey, more than one-third of respondents (38%) said that *access to affordable dental care* is one of the most important health needs of people in their community. Similarly, in the written survey, 31 percent of adults, and 22 percent of teens, said that they thought that *dental care* is one of the most important community health needs. Furthermore, *dental care* was mentioned in the Stakeholder Interviews, by participants from all seven focus groups and by participants from the Allentown, Concord and Canterbury community listening sessions as an important community health need.

The priority need for dental care is consistent with other reports.

The results suggest that dental care is a top-priority health need within the Concord region. Not only do respondents cite it as being one of the most needed health services that they themselves and their families have needed within the past month or past year, but dental care is also one of the most commonly occurring unmet needs of respondents, as well as one of the most commonly identified perceived needs within the community. These results are consistent with the NHCHI Workforce report which discusses New Hampshire's statewide shortage of dentists. These results are also consistent with United Way of Merrimack County 2005 Community Profile that states that more than one-half of third graders in New Hampshire have experienced tooth decay and that one-fourth of these children's dental needs go untreated.

Affordability of health care

Affordability of health care was identified as an ongoing priority need for residents in the Concord region.

Cost is often the reason why respondents are unable to obtain the medical care that they need.

Among all the reasons mentioned in the telephone survey for an inability to obtain needed medical care over the past year a *lack of insurance* (25%), an *inability to afford* the care (19%) and the *insurance coverage* costs for that care (16%) are the most frequently cited reasons. Similarly, in the online survey, respondents frequently cite the *cost* (43%), the *cost of insurance* (33%) and a *lack of insurance* (24%) as reasons why they and their families were unable to access a needed medical service over the past year. Furthermore, it is important to note that according to the telephone survey, the majority (71%) of respondents who do not have any health insurance indicate that it is because they *cannot afford it*. These results indicate that costs—whether for insurance, for the medical service itself or for the gap in insurance coverage of that medical service—are a major reason why residents in the Concord region are unable to obtain the medical care that they need.

Affordable health care is the most commonly perceived community health need.

The research indicates that more than two-thirds of respondents believe that affordable health care is one of their community's most important health needs. In the telephone survey, 71 percent of respondents cited *access to affordable medical care* as one of the most important health needs in their area. Similarly, in the written survey, 71 percent of adult respondents, and 72 percent of teen respondents, identified *affordable health care* as one of the most important health needs in their community. In addition, participants from the young teen, Boys and Girls Club, young mothers, senior citizen listening session and Community Provider Network of Central New Hampshire focus groups, as well as participants from the Bow, White Birch, Concord and Canterbury community listening sessions, mentioned concerns regarding the affordability of health care coverage and services.

Accessibility to Medical Care

The accessibility of medical care in the Concord region is also a priority health need. While this health need often overlaps with the aforementioned affordability need, it is important to note that these two aspects are reported as separate health needs and that accessibility to and affordability of medical care are distinct needs in the region. That is, the results show that some respondents reported being unable to access medical care for reasons that are not associated with cost.

Some respondents are unable to access the medical care that they need.

According to the telephone survey, respondents who have an adult in their household who used a hospital emergency room for non-emergency care in the past year were much more likely to indicate that they did so because it *took too long to get a doctor appointment* (33%) or because it *occurred over the weekend* (23%) than because they *could not afford it* (3%). Similarly, the vast majority (84%) of respondents who have a child in their household who used a hospital emergency room for non-emergency care in the past year indicated that it was because it *occurred over the weekend* (67%) or because it *took too long to get a doctor appointment* (17%), while no respondents said that a child in their household inappropriately used a hospital emergency room because they *could not afford it*. Consistent with these results, the online survey results show that 16 percent of respondents were unable to access the medical services that they needed because they *could not get time off from work or school*, while 10 percent were unable to access services because of the *location of the service* and two percent were unable to access services because of a *lack of transportation*. Together, these results indicate that a significant minority of residents in the Concord region are unable to obtain the medical care that they need because it is not readily accessible to them.

Many Concord region residents identify a need for improved medical care access in their community.

In the written survey, 26 percent of adults, and 11 percent of teens, indicated that they think that *getting an appointment* is one of the most important needs in their community, and 10 percent of adults and four percent of teens indicated that they think that *finding a doctor* is one of the most important needs in their community.

Many focus group participants identified a need for improved accessibility to medical services. Participants from the young teens, young mothers and Community Provider Network of Central New Hampshire focus groups identified a need for improved Primary Care Provider access. Participants from the young teen focus group also mentioned a need to travel to doctor appointments, and participants from the young mothers focus group also mentioned a need for Primary Care Providers to *accept new patients*. In addition, not only is it *difficult to see a doctor*, but *doctors spend too little time* with patients when they finally do see them. Several participants from the senior citizens listening session suggested *grouping health care services* for seniors—specifically for vision and hearing impaired seniors—to improve access. Seniors also identified a need for improved access to *primary care physicians* and *geriatricians* because there are not enough available in the area. The concerns expressed by focus group participants are consistent with the concerns expressed in the community listening sessions. In fact, participants from all six community listening sessions mentioned a concern about access to medical care. Participants from the Allenstown community listening session also reported difficulties seeing a doctor and a need for *Primary Care Providers to accept*

new patients. Notably, the need for transportation to medical services was a concern shared by participants from the Bow, White Birch, Pine Rock and Canterbury community listening sessions.

The need for improved accessibility to medical services is consistent with existing reports.

The results from the primary research indicate that there is a need for improved accessibility to medical services in the Concord region. These results are consistent with the NHCHI Workforce report which discusses the national and statewide growing need for more doctors and nurses. These results are also consistent with the United Way of Merrimack County 2007 Needs Assessment which identifies the need for improved access to health care among vulnerable populations as the county's second highest priority.

Access to affordable mental and behavioral health care

Access to affordable mental and behavioral health care is a priority health need in the Concord region.

The research suggests that there is an unmet need for mental and behavioral health care in the Concord region.

In the written survey, 20 percent of adults, and four percent of teens, identified *mental health care* as the health service that they have needed most in the past month. Consistent with this, four percent of respondents in the online survey said that *mental and behavioral health care* is the health service that they and their family have needed most in the past year. However, it is important to note that, while only four percent of respondents in the online survey identified *mental and behavioral health care* as the health service that they and their family have needed most in the past year, more respondents (6%) said that *mental and behavioral health care* is the health service that they and their family have not been able to access more than any other health service. Similarly, the telephone survey results show that 1.5 percent of all respondent households surveyed have an adult in their household, and 1.1 percent of respondent households surveyed with children have a child in their household, who has been *unable to receive the mental or behavioral health care* that they need in the past year. These results suggest that, while only a minority of respondents need mental or behavioral health care, a significant amount of those who do are not able to access the care they need.

Many residents in the Concord region perceive that there is a need for mental and behavioral health care in their community.

In the telephone survey, 28 percent of respondents cited *access to affordable mental counseling* as one of the most important health needs of their communities. In the written survey, nine percent of adults, and nine percent of teens, indicated that they think that *mental health care* is one of the most important health needs in their community.

Consistent with these results, the 2008 Stakeholder Interviews identified *mental health* as the community's top-priority health need, and notes from the focus groups and

community listening sessions indicate that mental and behavioral health needs were mentioned by participants from all of the seven focus groups and participants from Pine Rock and Canterbury community listening sessions. In fact, participants from the senior listening session identified *psycho-social* needs as the most important health need (the third most important overall need, behind taxes and transportation). Furthermore, participants from the young teens, Boys and Girls Club teen group, young mothers and clergy focus groups repeatedly mentioned mental and behavioral health concerns such as *depression* and *anxiety*.

The need for mental and behavioral health care in the Concord region is consistent with other reports.

A primary need for mental and behavioral health care in the capital region is consistent with findings from other reports. The NHCHI Workforce report indicates that there is a statewide shortage of mental and behavioral health care providers across New Hampshire, and the Kids Count Data Book 2008 identifies an increased use of mental health services among children in the Concord region. The United Way of Merrimack County 2007 Needs Assessment cites *mental illness services* as one of the county's priorities for 2007. In addition, the Youth Suicide Prevention Assembly identifies suicide as the second leading cause of death among New Hampshire youth, surpassing the national rate. This emphasizes the need for improved access to mental and behavioral health care in the capital region. Furthermore, Concord Hospital admission data reveals that approximately 2.6 percent of Concord Hospital Emergency Department and Horseshoe Pond visits are mental health visits. Finally, consistent with concerns expressed by focus group participants, Emergency Room Psychiatric Data from Riverbend show that an estimated 31 percent of admissions are due to depressive disorders and a significant minority (6%) are anxiety related.

Access to affordable prescription drugs

Access to affordable prescription drugs is a secondary health need in the Concord region.

Some respondents cannot afford to get their prescriptions filled.

In the telephone survey, five percent of respondents have an adult in their household, and one percent of respondents have a child in their household, who has been *unable to get a prescription filled* in the past year. These results indicate that prescription drugs are the second most common unmet need of adults and one of the third most common unmet needs of children among telephone respondents. Similarly, in the written survey, 14 percent of adults, and four percent of teens, indicated that they have been unable to fill a prescription during the last year primarily because they *could not afford it*.

Many residents in the Concord region think that access to affordable prescription drugs is one of their community's most important health needs.

In the telephone survey, 45 percent of respondents identified *access to affordable prescription drugs* as one of the most important health needs in their area. These results are consistent with the written survey, which shows that *prescription drug cost* is the second most frequently identified community health need by adults (44%) and the third most frequently identified community health need by teens (15%).

The results from the focus groups also show that many residents are concerned about *access to affordable prescription drugs*. In the senior citizen listening session discussion, many participants noted that *people with a moderate income cannot afford the high cost of medication*, and many identified *financial assistance for prescription medication* as one of the most important issues facing the community. Participants from the school teachers and guidance counselors focus group mentioned *Eldercare Prescription Assistance* as one of the important health needs, and participants from the clergy focus group said that they believe that people should be able to *fill prescriptions after hours*. In addition, participants from the Bow community listening session expressed concern about the *Prescription Assistance Medication Program*.

Family planning services including sexual education and STI/STD prevention and treatment

Family planning services, including sexual education and prevention and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), is a secondary health need in the capital region.

There is a small, yet significant, population of Concord region residents in need of family planning services.

Although few respondents in the online survey (3%), adult written survey (2%) or teen written survey (2%) indicated that *family planning services* are one of their most important health needs, it is important to note that this still a sizable population of residents for a service far less universally utilized, such as medical and dental care. According to the telephone survey, 0.5 percent of all respondent households surveyed contain an adult who needs but has been *unable to obtain family planning services* in the past year.

There is a perceived and actual need for family planning services among the Concord region's youth population.

In the telephone survey, 22 percent of respondents mentioned that *family planning services* are one the most important health need of people in their area. Family planning services, including STI and STD prevention and treatment, were mentioned as needs in the young mothers, school teacher and guidance counselor and clergy focus group, and were mentioned frequently by participants from the young teen and Boys and Girls Club teen focus groups. In fact, participants from the Boys and Girls Club teen group identified *HIV* as the third most important health concern, and participants also mentioned *teen pregnancy, distribution of condoms, STI and STD treatment, parental education, classroom education and resources of where to go for help* as needs. Notably, none of the participants in the many of the community listening sessions mentioned a need or concern associated with family planning services.

Data from other reports indicate a need for family planning services including sexual education and STI/STD treatment and prevention. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicates that 45 percent of youth in New Hampshire have had sexual intercourse, and that 34 percent of the youth in New Hampshire are currently sexually active. Furthermore, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey also shows that while youth in New Hampshire (12%) are at less risk for having *sexual intercourse with four or more persons*

than youth nationally (15%), that this state number has increased by three points from 2005 (9%). Finally, data also show that more than one-third (36%) of students who report being currently sexually active also report failing to use a condom the last time they had sexual intercourse.

Alcohol or substance abuse treatment and prevention

Alcohol and substance abuse treatment and prevention is a secondary health need in the Concord region.

Few respondents report the need for alcohol or substance abuse care.

No respondents in the telephone survey indicated that there was anyone in their household who has needed, but has been unable to obtain care for *alcohol or substance abuse* treatment in the past year. In the online survey, one percent of respondents said that *substance abuse* care is one of the health services that they and their family have needed most in the past year. In the written survey, two percent of adults, and two percent of teens, indicated that *alcohol or drug abuse* care has been one of their most important health needs in the past month.

Some residents think that one of the most important needs in their community is to address alcohol and substance abuse.

According to the telephone survey, 24 percent of respondents in 2008 identified *alcohol or substance abuse prevention and treatment* as one of the most important health needs of people in their area, up from eight percent in 2003. In the written survey, 10 percent of adults, and nine percent of teens, indicated that they believe that one of the most important needs that their community is facing is *alcohol and substance abuse*.

An analysis of other reports and qualitative data suggest a stronger need for alcohol or substance abuse prevention and treatment among both adults and teens.

Although the results from the telephone, online and written survey research suggest that there is a relatively low need for the treatment and prevention of alcohol and substance abuse in the capital region, the results of the focus groups along with data from other pertinent reports indicate a stronger need. Emergency Room Psychiatric data from Riverbend reveals that approximately seven percent of admissions are related to substance abuse and dependence. The SMART BRFSS data reveals that the rate of binge drinking (having five or more drinks in one occasion, more than once in the past month) is higher in the Concord region (18%) than at the state (16%) or national (16%) level. In addition, substance abuse was identified as the second top-priority health need in the 2008 Stakeholder Interviews, and was identified by participants as a health need during the Pine Rock and Concord community listening sessions.

The research also indicates an increasing need among youth for alcohol abuse treatment and prevention. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 2007 indicates that almost one-half (45%) of youth drank alcohol in the past 30 days and more than one-fourth (29%) engaged in binge drinking in the past 30 days. In addition, the Pride Survey indicates that in the Concord region, 54 percent of youth have engaged in binge drinking, which is six points higher than the national level (48%).

This data is consistent with the concerns expressed by participants in the focus groups. Participants in the young teens focus group expressed concerns regarding drug addiction and students drinking during lunch, and participants from the Boys and Girls Club teen group said that their top concern is drug abuse. Participants from the Boys and Girls Club teen group also mentioned that the D.A.R.E. program is not working and said that there is a need for cheaper rehabilitation services, peer group sessions and demonstrative public education. Finally, participants from the school teacher and guidance counselor focus group said that the treatment and prevention of drug and alcohol substance abuse is an unmet need. Together, these results suggest that there is a need for alcohol treatment among both adults and teens in the capital region.

It should be noted that the relationship between alcohol and substance abuse should be considered a problem that is related to mental and behavioral health issues discussed above.

Smoking prevention and cessation

Smoking prevention and cessation remains a lower priority need in the Concord region.

Few respondents indicated a need for smoking prevention or cessation.

According to the telephone survey, only 0.5 percent of respondent households contain an adult with an unmet medical need for *smoking*. In the online survey, one percent of respondents indicated that the health service that they and their family have needed most in the past year is *smoking cessation*. In the written survey, two percent of adults, and none of the teens, said that the health service that they have needed most in the past 30 days is related to smoking.

A minority of residents believe that smoking prevention and cessation is one of the most important health needs that their community faces.

In the telephone survey, 21 percent of respondents mentioned *smoking prevention and/or treatment* as one of the most important health needs of people in their area. In the written survey, four percent of adults, and 13 percent of teens, indicated that they think that *smoking* is one of the most important community health concerns. Participants from three out of seven focus groups mentioned that *smoking prevention and cessation* is an important health need, while no participants in any of the six community listening sessions expressed concerns associated with smoking.

Healthy habits (i.e. healthy weight management, nutrition and exercise)

Healthy habits, including healthy weight management, nutrition and exercise, were also mentioned as health needs in the Concord region.

The research indicates that while some residents in the Concord region have a need for healthy habits, the majority of these needs are met.

In the online survey, 38 percent of respondents indicated that the health service that they and their family have needed most in the past year is related to *exercise opportunity* (21%), *weight management* (10%) or *nutrition* (7%). In the written survey, 10 percent of adults, and two percent of teens, said that one of the health services that they have needed most in the past 30 days is *nutrition*. However, results from the telephone survey indicate that these needs are largely being met. Only two percent of households contain an adult with an unmet medical need for *healthy weight management*, and only one percent of households have a child with an unmet medical need for *healthy weight management*.

Participants in the senior citizen, Boys and Girls Club teen, school teacher and guidance counselor and clergy focus groups, as well as participants from the Bow and Canterbury community listening sessions expressed concerns or identified needs associated with maintaining a healthy weight, eating a more nutritious diet or exercising. Participants from the Community Provider Network of Central New Hampshire focus group expressed concerns about obesity and the quality of food at food pantries. Teens from the Boys and Girls Club listening session expressed concern for healthier food at school, and participants from the school teacher and guidance counselor focus group expressed concern for diabetes among middle school students. Participants from the young mother focus group not only mentioned nutrition, but also mentioned *healthy cooking classes*, *baby food preparation classes* and *athletic opportunities* as health needs. Finally, participants from the Bow and Canterbury community listening sessions identified exercise and fitness as health needs.

Access to healthcare information and health education

Access to health care information and health education in the Concord region is another health need.

Some residents in the Concord region think that there is a need for improved access to healthcare information and health education.

In the online survey, 12 percent of respondents indicated that *health information* is the health service that they and their family have needed most in the past year. In the written survey, two percent of the adults, and none of the teens, identified *health education* as the one of the health services that they have needed most in the past month.

Participants from the Community Provider Network of Central New Hampshire, young teen, young mothers, and school teacher and guidance counselor focus groups mentioned a need for improved access to health care information or health education. Participants in the Community Provider Network of Central New Hampshire focus group identified a need for *better public education of services*, and participants from the school teacher and guidance counselor focus group mentioned *allergy food education* and *illness management* as well as a need for a *website for resource information* and an *info-line*. Participants from the young teen focus group mentioned a need for *general hygiene*, *punitive alcohol* and *sex education*. Finally, participants from the young mother focus group would like *classes on baby food preparation*, *open sessions with Registered Nurses*, *support resource information* and *education on options*.

In addition, participants from the White Birch, Pine Rock, Allenstown and Canterbury

community listening sessions identified a need for access to health care information and health education. Participants from the White Birch community listening session said that information about emergency preparedness is lacking, that many people are not getting important documents or other written information such as the REACH document, that there is a need for wellness and health promotion information and resources and that an overall need for health information and resources exists. Participants from the Pine Rock community listening session also expressed concern about finding resources and getting information, while participants from the Allenstown community listening session expressed concern about a lack of basic information about current services offered at hospitals, and participants from the Canterbury listening session identified a specific need for price information associated with health care and medical services.

While many respondents go to their doctor for health information, an increasing amount are using the Internet.

In the telephone survey, 46 percent of respondents said that they would ask a doctor or nurse for general health information, while 30 percent said they would search the Internet. Notably, the percentage of respondents in the telephone survey who said that they would *search the Internet* for general health information has increased by 13 points from 2003 (17%). In the written survey, 75 percent of adults, and 41 percent of teens, said that they would go to their *doctor* for health information. However, it is important to note that *the Internet* was not a response option in the written survey.

Motor vehicle accidents

Motor vehicle accidents are a lower priority health need in the Concord region.

Results from the telephone survey indicate that 19 percent of respondents mentioned motor vehicle accidents as the most important health need of people in their area, a rise from 3 percent that mentioned it in 2003. In the written survey, one percent of adults, and seven percent of teens, indicated that they thought that one of the most important needs that their community faces is *motor vehicle accidents*. In addition, only one focus group out of the seven mentioned a concern about *crazy drivers*. According to the six community listening session notes, no participants expressed concerns about motor vehicle accidents.

Appendix A: Graphic Presentation