



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation with Homeless Women
Women's Shelter, Rockville
August 5, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on health and well-being in partnership with Health Care for the Homeless on Wednesday, August 5, 2015. The conversation took place from 8:00 pm to 9:00 pm in Rockville, MD. There were 17 participants. The conversation was facilitated by Anne Wiseman.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Due to the size of the group, there was one discussion instead of break out groups. Participants were offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing. The conversation was abbreviated in order to comply with the shelter's schedule and the availability of participants.

Defining Health and Well-Being

Participants were asked to think about a time when they were at their healthiest. They were then asked to respond to "*What does healthy mean to you?*" Below are their responses:

- Eating right/healthy (i.e. healthy proteins, carbs) which causes you to feel good about yourself
- Walking
- Exercising (on weekly basis)
- Swimming
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Positive thinking, positive mindset
- Cutting out sweets, weight loss
- Actively involved in school/church/community
- [Acknowledgement that] eating healthy fights depression

Assets and Barriers to Health and Well-Being

The participants were asked to think about community assets, or the things that are working to keep the community healthy, and the challenges of maintaining "healthiness" in the community. Given the abbreviated time, the discussion wasn't as long as originally planned. During the conversation, it was noted that the county could do a better job communicating the availability of programs and services, particularly to vulnerable populations. Some of the participants knew how to access healthy programs



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and services. However, the majority of the participants were not aware of some of the services offered by the county. Below are their responses:

What is going well in your community—how do you know it is a healthy community?

- Having access to farmer's Market(s)

What is not going well in your community?

- Not having access to pools
- Not having (easy) access to fishing
- Lots of unhealthy eating places (when compared with the number of healthy eating places)
- Not working or as active
- No/limited access to job readiness programs
- Less of a choice in food (at shelter)
- Unhealthy socialization within the community at large
- It's hard to navigate systems; feelings of enmeshment and boundary crossing with regarding to customer service, lack of coordination among departments, no privacy within systems.

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

Participants were asked to identify changes that should be addressed within the community. The top themes included **better coordination among service organizations and increased access to services**. Below are their responses:

- More financial help
- Better training for bus drivers (re: communication, sensitivity and customer service)
- Bus stops need more shelter areas
- Access to more recreation that affordable
- More partnership between health organizations, human services organizations and shelters (or other organizations that serve homeless populations)
- More communications on resources and how to locate them
- Make it easier to navigate the Montgomery County website
- Acknowledge that services touch people (i.e. community members do not feel that basic needs are taken into consideration regarding funding, operations or the timeliness of decisions that affect services.)
- More (free) wifi hotspots
- More access to parks
- More housing programs that serve a more diverse set of people (i.e. single, childless adults and young people)



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Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, "Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?" A few participants responded to this question and their comments are provided below.

"I enjoyed the community conversation."

"I liked the conversation and hope more resources will soon be available. "

"I think, if there is a way, it would be nice to have more vision, orthodontic, and medical things like the dental mobile van."

"Thanks for coming. I learned that your whole circle has to be healthy."

"While the conversation was good, I feel many were not speaking about the community, but the shelter. This made the conversation become weaker."

Facilitator Summary

The conversation encompassed several general themes regarding their experiences in their community/communities. Many of the participants spoke about access and/or lack of access to things that supported them in healthy living. Their conversation spoke to the realities they face as part of a shelter system as well as the contrast and difficulties of navigating systems when one is in transition. In advocating for better access to services, many of the participants repeated the need for better communication between service providers (including bus drivers), an easier coordination of services and a general awareness of the needs of persons who are homeless.