

**Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP)
Forces of Change Assessment, September 27, 2012
Volusia County Health Department**

Introduction

Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) is a method of conducting a comprehensive community health assessment. It was developed from 1997-2000 by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) in cooperation with the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Four assessments comprise MAPP.

The Forces of Change Assessment is one of the four MAPP assessments and seeks to identify factors that can affect health in a community. Areas to consider include political, economic, social, technological, environmental, scientific, legal, and ethical. This assessment seeks to answer these two main questions:

- What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?
- What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these occurrences?

The results can be used to assist the community in preparing how to respond to or capitalize on these factors and events.

Method

On September 27, 2012 the Midtown PACE-EH steering committee conducted a *Forces of Change* MAPP assessment during its monthly meeting. The Midtown PACE-EH steering committee is a group that initially came together for a PACE-EH project (Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health) to examine the environmental needs in the area. The group desired to do more than address the environment and has morphed into a health equity action team that is seeking to improve nutrition, education, and crime in the community. Attendees included individual residents as well as representatives from key organizations in the community. 15 attendees participated in this assessment which was facilitated by staff from the Volusia County Health Department.

Prior to the meeting, the facilitators provided participants with a brief overview of MAPP and Forces of Change and requested advance completion of a brainstorming worksheet to help stimulate and focus discussion. The meeting consisted of nearly an hour of open discussion that was documented on the large white board within the conference room where all could see. After the meeting pictures were taken of the white board to catalogue the findings. The activity yielded six forces of change.

After the meeting, the facilitator completed a Threats and Opportunities worksheet based on the discussion.

Findings

Six major forces of change were identified by the group. Each force and associated threats and opportunities is summarized below.

Economy

Threats: The current poor economy was at the forefront of the discussion and was mentioned throughout the assessment because of its far-reaching implications. Because having a job is directly tied to access to care, many Volusia County residents who have lost jobs have also lost their health insurance which leaves them with limited options such as: paying cash; seeking care at a free clinic, many of which have long waiting lists; or utilizing the emergency department of their local hospitals for non-emergency care. One group member pointed out that not only did the poor economy effect jobs but also homeownership. The member pointed to the low level of owner occupancy for the county to validate their point. Also mentioned by multiple group members was the rise in the homeless population specifically in the Daytona Beach city region. According to the Council on Homelessness 2011 report Volusia County has an estimated 2,215 homeless people. This population poses a huge burden on community resources, as well as local hospital emergency departments where the population often turns to for primary care.

Opportunities: Although not many opportunities related to the economy were offered, a reduction in resources avails agencies a time to focus on efficiency and productivity as we are stretched to do more with less. These circumstances may lead to a streamlining of processes or an innovative approach and/or partnership that may otherwise have been overlooked.

Healthcare/Insurance Infrastructure

Threats: Many participants noted the challenges of acquiring health care for the growing numbers of un- and underinsured residents. These individuals face many barriers in attempting to see primary care providers in an outpatient setting, and thus often times seek care at emergency rooms which leads to more expensive and less effective care. One of the most concerning barriers mentioned by the group was provider biases. Examples of healthcare providers treating individuals differently because of their income, ethnicity, gender, and race were discussed. Several participants expressed concern about the status of Medicaid in Florida which acts as a safety net for many vulnerable residents in Volusia County. Due to low reimbursement rates, finding healthcare providers who accept Medicaid—particularly specialists—is challenging in Volusia County and in the region in general.

Opportunities: Hosting medical students and residents from area programs could provide increased health access for Volusia County residents as some of these future providers are likely to settle in the area. The possibility of expanding the network of volunteer clinics and federally funded clinics was also seen as a promising practice, given the valuable contribution of these clinics in Volusia County.

Legislation

Threats: With the upcoming presidential elections, many members of the group voiced concerns about the future of healthcare and what each candidate's election would mean. The group was also concerned about the local government's seeming lack of interest in the Midtown area.

Opportunities: Although the presidential elections brought concerns, there was an underlying hope that healthcare would be a key issue to each candidate, given the current administration's healthcare act. Members also voiced both concerns and opportunity in the privatization of Medicaid. The group agreed that the privatization of Medicaid was a "wait and see" scenario.

Education

Threats: Research has shown a direct correlation between the level of education and health outcomes; this is partially due to more educated people having more resources to be healthy, as well as these individuals possessing a higher level of health literacy and self-advocacy. Those with less education require more assistance to understand health concepts. Participants discussed the poor education and poor educational assistance the children in the Midtown region are receiving. This only leads to poor health outcomes as previously stated. Participants also discussed the stigma that every student needs to get a college degree as negative and limiting to many students' future opportunities.

Opportunities: One member discussed the wealth of resources in the community with three college campuses so near the Midtown area. Utilizing the education majors as mentors/tutors to improve education assistance programs in the Midtown area was discussed. Necessary for that to succeed would be investment in funding background checks and fingerprinting of those college students to remove the barrier to volunteering. Another opportunity mentioned was the expansion of trade schools and the removal of the college degree stigma. One member stated that there were over 450 manufacturing companies in Volusia County with open positions they were unable to fill because applicants did not have the necessary trade training. All of these efforts to improve the education and job opportunities of the residents of Volusia County would also improve health outcomes.

Prevention

Threats: The downturn of the economy also has implications for public health and healthcare funding. Because many funding streams are proportional to income taxes, more people out of work means fewer taxes collected and less funding for the programs supported by these taxes. The participants noted that in order to accommodate the smaller funding stream many programs had been cut or downsized, specifically in the prevention category. The participants also discussed the high health inequality in the Midtown area specifically pointing to the high incidence of HIV and the limited access to preventive programs.

Opportunities: The Volusia County YMCAs have begun to offer a diabetes prevention program that in clinical trials has shown great promise in helping participants to lose weight and get active. The Volusia County Health Department has partnered with the YMCA to make this program available to low-income residents through grants with the hope to improve the health of the community. The reduction in funding is leading to the pursuit of other creative partnerships which in the long run may be beneficial to the community.

Healthy Community Design

Threats: Being the main focus of the group, this force brought about the most discussion. The major threat to healthy community design discussed during the assessment was limited access to healthy foods. For residents of Midtown, venues that offer fresh fruits and vegetables are sparse or lacking. Affordability of healthier foods was also noted as a challenge for Volusia County residents with limited resources. Lack of transportation was included in the reasons for limited access to both healthy foods and healthcare services. There was, in addition, concern over the lack of mental health resources and dental care for low income adults. Also concerning the members of the group was the increased drug culture in the Midtown area, specifically with the rise of prescription drug abuse. Multiple participants also felt that the decline in traditional family values was having a detrimental effect on the health outcomes of the Volusia County. Overall the group felt that the outside population had a poor perception of the city of Daytona which only increased the struggle to improve the community.

Opportunities: Members of the group with religious affiliations pointed to utilizing the faith based organizations to help meet the many needs of the community. Participants also discussed improving communication and cooperation between existing organizations to better meet the needs of the community. As in the education discussion, members pointed to the need to remove barriers from those willing to volunteer their time.

Conclusion

Several themes arose during discussion of the threats to and opportunities for the health system in Volusia County. The economic downturn has major implications for health which was reflected by the number of times participants noted its impact. However, opportunities to seek more partnerships, new funding sources, and other job opportunities were met with enthusiasm by many participants who acknowledged the potential in these areas for improving health in Volusia County.

As stated in the Introduction, *Forces of Change* is one of four MAPP assessments that are part of a community health assessment. As the Volusia County Health Department moves forward with completing the remaining assessments and formulating a health improvement plan, these findings should be revisited for relevancy as some of the factors and accompanying threats and opportunities may be very different. This assessment should be on-going and reflect what is happening around us at each stage of the process to serve as a useful tool for planning and change.