

FORCES OF CHANGE



Mobilizing for Action through Planning & Partnerships (MAPP)

Assessment 1

Polk County, Florida

Released October 2011



Polk Health Care Alliance
www.polkhealthcarealliance.com



**Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP)
Forces of Change Assessment – January 14, 2010
Polk Health Care Alliance**

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 January 14, 2010 the Polk Health Care Alliance (PHCA) conducted a *Forces of Change* MAPP assessment during its monthly meeting. The PHCA is a task force of over 30 community health care and social service representatives whose mission is to create conditions for a healthier community where citizens achieve a high quality of life and have access to affordable quality health care. Attendees included PHCA members as well as representatives from key organizations in the community. Fifty attendees participated in this assessment which was facilitated by staff from the Polk 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 1.5 hours of open discussion that was documented on large sheets of paper that were displayed throughout the room during the entire meeting. The activity yielded nine forces of change and discussion of each force's opportunities and threats.

After the meeting, the lead facilitator completed a Threats and Opportunities worksheet based on the discussion which was sent to the group for review.

FINDINGS

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

Economy

Threats: The recent downturn of the 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 Polk County residents who have lost jobs have also lost their health insurance which leaves them with limited options such as paying cash or seeking care at a free clinic, many of which have long waiting lists. Polk County's rate of growth has outpaced that of the State which means that our county may have a disproportionate number of residents who may need assistance with health services. PHCA members who service the homeless population reported an increase in homeless families—in particular, children—who are turning to emergency departments for primary care. Another major challenge noted was the increased need for transportation for medical services, given that public transportation does not reach all areas of the county.

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 providing health care for 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. For those who are insured, complexities navigating health systems were also discussed. With the rise of managed care organizations that may not always be patient-centered, specialty referrals and access to choice medications can be difficult to obtain. Additionally, certain specialty care—particularly for pediatrics—is not available in Polk County and requires travel to either Tampa or Orlando.

Opportunities: The recent emphasis on integrated medical and behavioral health homes offers funding opportunities to provide increased access and improved health outcomes. Hosting medical students and residents from area programs could also provide increased health access for Polk County residents as some of these future providers are likely to settle in the area. The possibility of expanding the network of volunteer clinics was also seen as a promising practice, given the valuable contribution of these clinics in Polk County.

Legislation

Threats: Several participants expressed concern about the status of Medicaid in Florida which acts as a safety net for many vulnerable residents in Polk County. Due to low reimbursement rates, finding healthcare providers who accept Medicaid—particularly specialists—is challenging in Polk County and in the region in general. Additionally, a limited formulary that changes often and without warning, poses barriers for many clients. Others discussed uncertainty about the future of Medicaid; with reform looming in the future that will likely lead to increased enrollment in HMOs, providers may be discouraged from seeing these clients due to low reimbursement rates that do not cover the costs of care.

Opportunities: Although the current state of Medicaid was seen as a threat, many participants voiced optimism regarding the potential of national healthcare reform and the possibility that this will provide healthcare access to the majority of the uninsured and underinsured. Leaders in behavioral health stated that future legislation would likely further prioritize, and possibly require, integrated healthcare for certain funding opportunities.

Funding Resources

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. With an unclear economic future at the local, state, national, and even global levels, most participants felt it prudent to pursue other funding opportunities.

Opportunities: Participants mentioned the need to seek grant funding from foundations and other private organizations. Some PHCA member agencies have successfully procured some of these grants and could help to spearhead future applications or serve as mentors for other PHCA members. Other possibilities for funding include seeking out research opportunities which may involve partnering with local universities, and grants that focus on education and prevention.

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. A general lack of understanding of this important connection was noted as a threat to educational efforts to reach those with lower health literacy. Participants noted that education has a particularly important role in improving nutrition, teen pregnancy, and communicable diseases.

Opportunities: By providing more education to Polk County residents, some participants felt this would empower consumers to take more responsibility for their health and health-related decisions; nutrition and exercise were two areas that were highlighted as promising topics. Strategies to educate stakeholders and the public include creating talking points from national and local Healthy People 2010 efforts and examining health education models for the following target groups: 1) providers and patients 2) pre-school age children 3) school age children 4) women of child-bearing age.

Prevention

Threats: The recent appearance of a novel flu strain, H1N1, challenged the public health system in its response to an unknown infectious threat. Although the local public health system responded well and minimized the impact on Polk County, the unpredictable nature of these types of occurrences is ever-present and will continue to threaten the system's ability to prevent and mitigate ill-effects on health. The steady increase in the number of Polk County residents with chronic medical conditions, including obesity, is a threat to the health system. Many community agencies work to prevent complications that occur as a result of these conditions; however, a larger threat to our health system may be forthcoming if we do not prevent more residents from developing these chronic illnesses.

Opportunities: The alarming trend of rising obesity is a major threat to our county and nation; however, participants were optimistic that increased awareness of this problem offers an opportunity to address obesity, especially among children. Discussion centered on seeking funding for strategies that focus on prevention as well as treatment of obesity.

Technology

Opportunities: Participants felt that technology was largely an area of opportunity, with the main threat being the ability to keep up with advances or risk being unable to compete for funding and other resources. Partnerships with universities such as the "medical city" at the University of Central Florida's medical school hold promise for development of capacity in Polk County. Tapping into information technology consortiums that have convened in the region (e.g., University of South Florida Polytechnic and Lakeland Regional Medical Center) to explore electronic health records, health information exchange, and integrated health care was also discussed as an important strategy. Potential benefits noted were the capability to track demographics and other health trends as well as exploring telemedicine projects for rural and underserved areas.

Best Practices

Threats: Participants cited the need to seek out best practices to address many of the issues discussed throughout the assessment. Utilization of best practices is an important quality performance measure, as well as a key component of grant proposals. A particular need that could benefit from modeling best practices is the recruitment and retention of specialists to Polk County.

Opportunities: The formation and function of the PHCA was recognized as an example of a local best practice. Participants listed important activities that have resulted from the work of the PHCA such as the establishment of the indigent healthcare sales tax and subsequent health network and the previous community health assessment and health improvement plans (i.e., 2007 MAPP and CHIP). Further steps for the PHCA include recruiting more diverse health agencies to become members and developing internal capacity for adopting best practices.

Healthy Community Design

Threats: The major threat to healthy community design discussed during the assessment was limited access to healthy foods. In many areas of the county, venues that offer fresh fruits and vegetables are sparse or lacking. Affordability of healthier foods was also noted as a challenge for Polk County residents with limited resources.

Opportunities: Polk County planners have recognized the need for community design that promotes health, and are working with the Polk County Health Department to include healthy design principles in the County's next seven-year comprehensive plan. Emphasis will be placed on supporting safe physical activity through increased active transit options, walkable continuous sidewalks, and more trails.

CONCLUSION

Several themes arose during discussion of the threats to and opportunities for the health system in Polk 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 best practices were met with enthusiasm by many participants who acknowledged the potential in these areas for improving health in Polk 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 PHCA 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.