

Introduction

On May 9, 2013, Southwest Arizona Futures Forum hosted an engaging Plenary Session titled *Improving the Health of our Community*. The half-day event, attended by over 100 community leaders, was designed to facilitate open dialog and engagement of key community leaders, stakeholders and public servants. During the plenary, participant's collectively assessed current programs and initiatives, evaluated community health values and identified new ideas for engaging and supporting community wellness. Prior to the plenary, all registered participants were provided with pre-read documents that included the recently completed Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by HPSA Acumen, Inc.

The plenary began with an overview of the *Yuma County Health Needs Assessment* results, presented by Marijka and John Lampard of HPSA Acumen, Inc. This descriptive analysis of demographic, health statuses and health outcomes data was provided to facilitate development of programs to improve the health of residents in Yuma County, Arizona. The analysis included demographic information as well as highlighted health concerns particular to the Yuma Region, including its designation as a HPSA (Health Professionals Shortage Area) and high rates of obesity and diabetes. However, the report showed that despite perceived barriers such as high rates of poverty and a large minority population, residents outperformed the rest of the state on most significant outcomes.

Following the *Needs Assessment* overview, Drs. Carl Myers and William J. Riley gave presentations on influencing positive health outcomes in Yuma County. Dr. Carl Myers, Vice President of Medical Affairs and Chief Medical Officer of the Yuma Regional Medical Center gave a presentation on "Leading the Way to Healthier Lifestyles", in which he detailed how and why Yuma County is capable of becoming the healthiest in the nation. Dr. William J. Riley, Director of the School for the Science of Health Care Delivery, presented "Setting the Stage for Public Health – You are the Stars", in which he described entry points for changing our healthcare model from an acute or "sick care" model to a preventative or "well care" model.

Following the presentations, attendees were divided into small focus groups to brainstorm on the barriers and solutions that will guide the future of health outcomes and healthcare in Yuma County. Following their discussions, the attendees reconvened to hear a summary report compiled from the individual panel reports. This report is a summation of the discussions from the breakout panel sessions.

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Question 1

Where does the Yuma Region rate in terms of health versus the rest of the United States?

As we heard from the panelists, the Yuma Region has many unique characteristics that will impact the future of our population's health. We are a federally designated HPSA (Health Professionals Shortage Area), we have a higher number of minorities and senior "snowbird" visitors, and we experience higher levels of poverty than the rest of the nation. Yuma County also has high rates of chronic health condition and low education rates. These factors can exacerbate the difficulty of accessing items that increase health outcomes, ranging from healthy foods to Primary Care Providers (PCPs). Because we also have a high concentration of non-native speakers, communication between providers and a population with English as a Second Language (ESL) can cause further challenges.

Despite all those perceived barriers, Yuma has many health facilitators that we can maximize and grow. Yuma County is third in the nation for vegetable production, and the vegetable growers have a strong incentive to drive the message of the nutritional value of fruits and vegetables. We have a history of response to grassroots marketing efforts, as evidenced by the Healthy Yuma 2011 campaign. We also have a strong history of "homegrown" efforts to address problems in our community, including the PowerPlayte school nutrition program, Mileage Club school walking programs, school gardens, cooking classes, and outreach programs and walks/runs sponsored through our Recreation Department. Lastly, the infrastructure in the region is improving, with changes being made to the overall health care system in the region (e.g., new Cancer Center, expanded Emergency Department at Yuma Regional Medical Center).

A. How healthy are we?

Yumans share the key health issues such as obesity and diabetes that have become national epidemics.

- The major chronic diseases, diabetes, heart disease, strokes, and Alzheimer's Disease are all highly correlated with lack of physical activity or poor nutrition.
- Truly positive changes require us to set goals that are far beyond the current state or national averages.
- Yuma is better than the national average in the rate of heart disease, cancer, and smoking. However, Yuma ranks poorly in the areas of diabetes, obesity, and the rates of exercise and fruit and vegetable intake. Yumans' life expectancies are also significantly higher than the national average.
- The teen birth rate in Yuma County is several times the national average. Education and income are below average too.
- The rate of sexually transmitted diseases is also significantly higher than national norms.

B. What are the challenges we face in the Yuma Region?

Challenges in Yuma include the lack of health care providers and high rates of poverty and obesity.

- Overall health is closely linked to socioeconomic conditions. High obesity and poverty rates are highly correlated conditions.
- Clear messages in health care prevention and wellness are lacking.

- There needs to be more cooperation between healthcare providers, municipalities, Tribes, healthcare systems, etc.
- There is a lack of mental health awareness and programs.
- Families simply do not know where to obtain help, or even recognize that help is needed. Social/cultural factors compound this issue.
- Yuma has a high population of older people, who are less likely to make changes to their lifestyle.
- The overall infrastructures do not support wellness.
- Yumans have to travel too far for certain types of healthcare.
- Many of our populations are pre-disposed to diabetes.
- We lack facilities for exercise.
- We do not have enough programs targeted to youth.
- Teen pregnancy correlates to low education/poverty rates.
- Fewer physicians, therefore people are being treated for primary health care in the ER, which is not the place for the treatment of chronic illness.
- Physicians are overwhelmed and can't see patients.
- Limits on infrastructure.
- Added strain of delivering health care to outlying areas.

C. What are we doing right?

- The new YRMC Cancer Center will improve access and won't require travel to other cities.
- Community events such as health days, walks, etc. highlight health issues.
- School systems are making improvements with healthier menus, and encouraging kids to eat foods that are healthy.
- Local agricultural industries provide healthy foods to food banks and community.
- Mileage Club programs for youth encourage daily walking activities.
- School-based health care is great initiative.
- Healthy Yuma 2011.
- More running events are coming to Yuma – for instance, the RAD run was well received
- Parks and Rec offers a multitude of programs
- Power Plates in the School District elementary schools create a fun environment for healthy eating.
- Gary Knox Elementary School is having great success with a school gardening program.
- Somerton Farmer's Market use opportunities to teach good nutrition and cooking skills.
- We have community health centers throughout the county.

D. How is Yuma health care faring versus the rest of the country?

Yuma does not have enough access to primary care providers (PCPs), and it's difficult to find pediatricians and other providers. Emergency room wait times are very long for a variety of reasons including, lack of primary care for winter visitors and residents who are not focused on preventative care and only visit the doctor when something is wrong. Also, it is difficult to truly determine how we compare to the rest of the country because we have both snowbirds and a migrant farm population.

- General lack of providers.
- Higher levels of poverty, which leads to lack of access to healthcare.
- Winter visitors impact results.
- Migrant farm workers skew comparisons to other communities.
- Our mortality rate is not as bad as Arizona as a whole.
- Our sociodemographic factors are decidedly unique.
- The overall delivery of healthcare in Yuma is good, and awareness continues to be raised.
- Yuma is an action-oriented community with a spirit of collaboration.
- Yuma is unique in that we have year-long access to outdoor activities.

Question 2

How does Yuma compare, in terms of health and health care, with the rest of the world?

Yuma thrives overall despite the barriers that affect our specific population base. However, lack of education and lack of coverage contribute to lack of participation in preventative care. Often, resources may be available but are not used to their full advantage. Underinsured individuals may delay care due to lack of funds for out of pocket expenses, or require the need to choose between food, gas, or other living expenses.

Losses in coverage for at-risk populations from AHCCCS combined with a shortage of Primary Care Providers severely limits the choices of at-risk populations for their care. Reduction in Medicare & Medicaid reimbursements and coverage require some patients to go to the Emergency Room for primary care concerns.

There is a shortage of physicians in the Yuma region. This is especially true of subspecialty physicians. In the Yuma region patients may seek treatment in other communities, or even other countries. Medical tourism is apparent in Yuma County, with visitors and some residents traveling for services to Algodones, Mexico. A medical discount network of providers exists that provides services at a discounted rate to people in Yuma County or San Luis, Mexicali, MX.

In comparison to other parts of the world, Yumans aren't focused on prevention. The focus tends to be on treatments for illnesses and conditions. The most prevalent health concerns our region experiences include a higher obesity rate and heart disease. Lifestyle and diet in Yuma is probably less healthy than other parts of the world. Yumans may consume too much fast food and not enough home cooked meals and healthy nutrition choices. On a positive note, the quality of physicians and providers is very good and funds are invested in research and technology to improve health care options and health care treatments.

Question 3

What is the cost of being unhealthy?

Poor health directly results in higher usage of the most expensive healthcare resources available. There is a financial impact on families, employers, and this takes a tremendous toll on the community as a whole, especially with under-insured or non-insured patients. Unhealthy practices affect our community, which is already short-staffed on healthcare professionals. Yuma employers shoulder much of the burden of unhealthy employee behaviors which contribute to increasing health insurance costs, loss of productivity, and increased absenteeism – factors that contribute negatively to our community and families. Poor health choices are passed on from one generation to the next. The group recommends making investments in education to reach the most at-risk populations and recognizes that this action item will require creative processes, such as after-hours access to healthcare, employer wellness programs, incentives, school programs, and focused health fairs and activities targeting the at risk populations to be successful. There will be costs and resources are associated with these efforts; however, the return on investment may offset these costs when changes in behaviors are addressed.

A. Cost to employers?

- Increased healthcare costs within organizations.
- Loss of productivity.
- Increase in absenteeism, sick days, and disability leave.
- An unhealthy employee may not be safe on the job.
- Employers and employees not able to afford the best medical benefit policies
- Health insurance premiums keep rising. Increasing benefit costs for employers result in higher employee premiums for health insurance.
- Impact to Recruitment (Law Enforcement) when young people cannot pass physical test.
- Health Spending Accounts and high deductible insurance programs may tend to make people make better health care consumers.
- Unhealthy patterns drives up premiums. Employers have to pay for all of those across the board. Those with chronic diseases use medical over and over again.
- Business should offer wellness programs and give incentives to employees who are healthy and keep healthcare costs down. Contracted agreements between employees and employers improve the health of employees and encourage employees to be responsible for their own health. Example: Yuma County offers programs to employees to encourage healthy choices

B. Cost to individuals and families

- Medical cost can deprive a family.
- When insurance costs go up, wages are decreased.
- If people were more aware of costs they might do more to take care of their health. Example: People who qualified for AHCCCS tend to use more health care. People who don't have coverage tend to wait and may result in higher total cost and worse health.
- Poor health choices are passed on from one generation to the next.
- Prevention is less expensive than treatment for illness.
- Emotional costs are high when chronic health or acute health conditions affect families.
- Financial impact in families – are we doing anyone any favors by extending life through ongoing care?
- Staying home to help the ill reduces wages to family and reduces education levels.
- Some family members may be unable to go outside or perform activities due to poor health and lack of movement ability.

C. Cost to community?

- Individuals all contribute to the community. Bad habits (including unhealthy eating) affect the entire community.
- We have a high number of elderly people with chronic health issues.
- Community is already short staffed on healthcare professionals and more unhealthy people can exacerbate wait times.
- School lunch menus are contributing to childhood obesity. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly Food Stamps) and WIC have programs available which educate recipients on healthy choices.
- Need to change, improve, promote community culture – promote biking, hiking, less driving, eating healthy.
- Need an increase in health education.
- Children will continue to have unhealthy habits into adulthood if they are not educated now.
- High unemployment contributes to lack of ability to purchase quality produce.
- People lose wages and that money isn't put back into the community.
- Poor physical health affects people mentally and emotionally.
- Increase in charity care and emergency room visits.
- With chronic conditions and aging population, healthcare gets very expensive. Example – dialysis for the very ill.
- Economic impact to community – sick cannot work.

Question 4

Health care as we know it is not sustainable. Identify the key stakeholders in improving the health of our community (e.g. schools, agriculture, government agencies, non-profit entities, employers, etc.)

Key stakeholders need to empower families within the Yuma community to make changes to improve their family's health. Sharing knowledge, not telling others how to behave, will allow individuals to choose to adapt their behavior.

Government mandates on individuals are ineffectual and unenforceable. Publication of calorie content for fast food menu items has been promoted effectively to raise awareness in other cities. Nutritional curriculum is actively occurring in programs such as those offered by from Yuma County Public Health Department.

Yuma County offers opportunities for Yuma County employees to participate in healthy activities. Private employers in Yuma County have set up exercise challenges for their staff on an individual basis with significant success stories of individual achievements. This has a direct benefit on the health insurance costs of the employer. Various Yuma County employers promote healthy cooking, better nutrition choices, and provide healthy menu options. Some others extend gym memberships to family members of employees, with the added value of supporting local business (gym) organizations.

A. What can stakeholders do to effect changes which will improve community health and reduce the cost of health care in our region?

- Option to join a gym with the employer paying the membership fee.
- Community planning – locate parks next to neighborhoods, decrease drive time, healthy municipal services.
- Restaurants posting calorie counts on menus, promoting healthier menus.
- Increase physical education in schools, including structured and non-structured.
- State curriculum needs to make health a mandatory class, not as an elective.
- Insurance brokers can educate on preventative health; can also lower insurance rate.
- Insurance companies offer health programs and incentives to stay healthy, can effect insurance rate
- We need safer sidewalks and real parks for people to use.
- Work with volunteers to motivate and move the community (grass root movements), those effected aren't those participating.
- Use resources such as senior citizens and youth to educate those that need the education.
- Mobile vegetable stands and other programs that would increase access to healthy foods.
- Remove unhealthy snack machines.

B. What can we do in work places to improve health care?

- Employees can provide wellness programs that include incentives to quit smoking or participate in exercise programs.
- Companies can promote physical activity; provide incentives to employees to join health clubs.

- Employers could offer different premiums. Offer discounts on insurance if they are willing to utilize gyms, working out, etc. Organizations should offer wellness programs for employees.

A. What policies can be adopted by governmental entities to improve the situation?

- Define Health care as either a right or a commodity. This will be the basis for how we address the problem.
- Eliminate drug advertisements.
- Improve education standards for health and nutrition.
- Reincorporate structured Physical Education (PE) time into schools. Make PE and Health mandatory.
- City can provide incentives to join healthy programs.
- Provide time off during the work day to engage in physical activity as well as provide facilities, i.e., military.

D. Provide examples of successful programs existing in the Yuma region or in other areas of the country for improving community health.

- Mobile clinic that visits schools.
- Community and School gardens.
- Relay for Life.
- Color Me Rad.
- Hospital YOUTH grant program and Mileage Club.
- Smoking cessation programs through hospital and other organizations.
- Local growers providing healthy choices, i.e., Bountiful Baskets.
- Ag students delivering fresh produce.
- School breakfast program.
- Exercise stations in public parks.
- Healthy Yuma 2011.
- Pre-diabetes program – United Healthcare offers free YMCA membership for the first 16 weeks, then discounted programs. Training done by motivational person versus personal trainer.
- VA – telehealth – using Skype, or other electronic devices.
- Hospice – TCU – chronic disease management.
- Utilization of case managers.
- Campesinos Sin Fronteras' diabetes management, smoking cessation, teenage pregnancy programs.

Question 5

As a community, how do we help individuals make successful lifestyle changes to improve their health?

In order for our community to improve the health of the citizens of Yuma County, we need to develop a cohesive strategy to better utilize the resources to synergize the various groups of our community to join the cause.

A. What changes are needed?

Three areas of change need to be addressed to build a healthier community: Infrastructure, Education and Promotion. For Infrastructure, we need to create affordable options (including food and transportation) and generate funds to increase physical activities and indoor recreation during the summer months. For Education, we need to inform families on healthy lifestyles, food addictions, healthy food choices and portion sizes. We also need to better communicate what programs are available as well as, work with schools to offer healthier menu options and to encourage students to incorporate nutritional foods into school projects. Finally, for Promotion, the community should use Social Media to more effectively promote good health.

Infrastructure:

- Recommend additional bike trails in Yuma County; revisit Bicycle Master Plan.
- Safe paths for long boards/skateboards.
- Summer months discourage outdoor activities. There is a need to create indoor summer activities.
- Need to create affordable alternative transportation.
- Increased funding for physical programs, school athletic programs.

Education:

- Focus on elementary education menu options.
- Incorporate nutritional foods into elementary school projects.
- Community needs to target entire families and educate them on the benefits of having a healthy family lifestyle.
- Better communicate to the residents of Yuma regarding healthy local resources.
- Yuma County Health Dept. partner with the Food Bank to include fresh produce preparation and recipe along with the fresh produce the Food Bank distributes.
- Educate people to eat more healthy food and reduce serving sizes.
- Provide education on food addictions.

Promotion:

- Social Media can promote local health initiatives.

B. What are individuals doing right?

Many organizations and individuals of Yuma County are already improving the health of our citizens. Yuma is "Getting Back to the Basics" Quechan added walking trails, AWC identified and publicized Yuma Area walking paths, our City parks are outstanding no-cost opportunities for physical activity, the new oncology center provides improved access, our school systems are creating healthier menus, and local agriculture companies provide healthy produce to the food banks and community.

C. What are the challenges to getting individuals to make the necessary changes?

With change come challenges. Many of our local challenges fall into three categories: Organization Coordination, Demographics and Media/Marketing.

Organization Coordination:

- There needs to be more cooperation between organizations: City, County, Tribes, etc.
- Increase in mental health awareness and access.

Demographics:

- Yuma is comprised of many younger people and many older people, with not much in between.
- Health care is linked to socio-economic status.
- High obesity and poverty rates are challenges for Yuma.
- Maybe some overuse/reliance on drugs. Problem is nationwide, but easy access to Mexico may make it worse in Yuma.
- Lack of education, peer group pressure, and busy lifestyles can lead to overreliance on cheap, fast food.

Media/Marketing:

- Not all residents have technology necessary to access social media
- Media/marketing encourages unhealthy choices and lifestyles.

D. How do we overcome those challenges?

These challenges can inspire us as a community to seek opportunities to overcome these obstacles through motivation, accountability and support.

Community-wide Challenge/Goal Setting:

- Challenges between municipalities (i.e., Somerton vs. San Luis) schools, and local companies.
- School nutrition program staff could collaborate on creating healthy and delicious choices for students.
- Challenge locally owned restaurants to post calorie content and identify locally grown produce on menus. (e.g. McCormick's & Schmidt's list locations of all ingredients).
- Social options – healthy clubs.
- Fun events – Color Me Rad, Toro Loco.

Family Challenge/Goal Setting:

- Parents play an important role model for healthy lifestyles.
- We need to plant the seeds to promote health benefits.

Promotion:

- GET message out about existing programs.
- Create a community-wide healthy environment and promote it.

E. How do we ensure that changes are long-term and meaningful for the general population?

We need to improve the health of Yuma; however it is important that we ensure that changes are long-term and meaningful for the general population of our community. We as community leaders will need to develop

creative ways to communicate the need and benefits of improving individuals' health through preventative care and proactive initiatives. The message must be persistent, utilizing creative means of communication such as social media, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter which will lead our diverse cultures to adapt toward healthy choices. For long-term change, we need to focus on preventative care. Physicians need to play a more of a role in educating patients on health and healthy lifestyles. Finally we need to find ways to create affordable health/exercise facilities.

Education:

- Eat for Health – identify addictions to food and emotional eating. Continue to meet once/month – potluck with healthy food options. Talk about your lifestyle and live by example.
- Physicians can play more of role in educating patients on health and healthy lifestyle.
- Use credible points of delivery for the message: teachers, physicians, parents
- Move cultural adaptation toward healthy choices versus traditional or short cut options. Grass roots empowerment at the family level, give them the tools and education. Take advantage of available social media options: Instagram, Facebook and Twitter – what is readily available and currently fresh? What are fast and good menu options for busy families?
- Focus on youth.

Community-wide Goal Setting:

- Initiate a Goal Setting program for the community with simple, small, and attainable benchmarks. Empower, support and provide tools for self-management. Be persistent and consistent to reach the community and help them maintain the changes.
- Examples: City of Yuma and JV Farms – Corporate culture sets the tone for the community to follow.
- Companies offer incentive based program for healthy choices/lifestyles.

Promotion:

- Engage local media to participate to keep the momentum for the program and community.

Infrastructure:

- Additional affordable health/exercise facilities.