

2013 MAT-SU COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Executive Summary

MAT-SU HAS A LOT TO BE PROUD OF

Looking at the big picture, the Mat-Su Borough has amazing assets in terms of natural environment and quality of life. People like living in Mat-Su; in fact, our population has been the fastest growing in Alaska for the last twenty years. We also have a rich sense of community with active chambers of commerce and community councils, a solid faith-based sector, and a strong school system with dedicated teachers and administrators. There are a wealth of examples of successful collaboration and cooperation among different organizations and agencies to improve health in the borough. All of this can help address the health problems that challenge our community.

In 2012, the Mat-Su Health Foundation, along with other community and statewide partners, embarked on a journey to understand the health of the Mat-Su population. We started by exploring existing data from ongoing surveys and the U.S. Census. We also commissioned a household survey, a workplace survey, and an assessment of local health policy and the built environment. We analyzed these data findings and in early 2013 launched a community meeting series where the information was presented and attendees were given an opportunity to identify our greatest health challenges.

The Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) report is a culmination of this journey. This report provides an overview of what we know about our health and what our residents have identified as priority issues.

We would like to thank the 526 Mat-Su residents and professionals who attended 23 community meetings to help identify the top five health priorities for our borough.

THE HEADLINES



Overwhelming consensus was revealed in our community about Mat-Su's greatest health challenges...

- ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The community views this as our leading health challenge. This issue leads to approximately 11 alcohol-induced deaths and 16 drug-induced deaths each year, 22% of our injuries requiring hospitalizations, and much stress and worry for families and children.

- CHILDREN EXPERIENCING TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE

This issue is directly related to our community's leading goal – to keep our children safe and well-cared-for. In the last year, we had over 1,625 protective service reports of child maltreatment and 420 substantiated allegations. One in four of our high school students have been bullied in the last year, and half of our middle school students have been in a physical fight.

WHAT WE HEARD

“I saw a heroin addict last week in the Emergency Department who thought she was pregnant. We did a pregnancy test and found out she wasn't. I had nowhere to send that girl. Just like drunks, I have nowhere to send them – they are the ones crashing into your vehicle.”

-Emergency Department physician

“If alcohol and substance abuse are addressed, many of the other issues would take care of themselves.”

-Wasilla senior

“Start at birth and find a way for the community to support families. People may not intend to hurt their child but because of the stress and strain it does happen. People want to be good parents but they do not have the skills.”

-Wasilla resident

- DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

The Mat-Su has a suicide death rate that is twice as high as the U.S. rate.

- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

More than one in ten high school students experience dating violence or have been physically forced to have intercourse when they did not want to.

- BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN NEED OF REPAIR

Children, families, and individuals are not getting the counseling, addiction treatment, and other services they need. There are long waiting lists, especially for children, and lack of money and transportation prevent many people from getting services.

There are other issues that affect our health that came up from the data review and at the meetings. These include overweight and obesity, lack of access to medical and dental care, smoking, injury, lack of access to safe and affordable housing, and decreased use of cancer screenings and immunizations.



WHAT WE HEARD

“Access to mental health care could eliminate a lot – if kids can heal from trauma. There are parents who can’t get their kids in to see someone – often there is a 6-8 week waiting list.”

-School principal

“Office of Children Services child maltreatment reports related to drugs and alcohol and whether people’s lives are violence-free [are important], but access to mental health services underlies everything – healthy mental health is related to all the rest.”

-Wasilla senior

THE FUTURE

The Mat-Su Health Foundation has chosen to focus our resources and energy on addressing the high priority health issues identified by the community. One of our foci will be working with local and statewide providers, organizations, and residents to ensure that all Mat-Su residents can have optimal mental and emotional health. To do this we will need a behavioral health system that works for everyone from children to seniors. *Healthy Seniors* was our first focus area, and that work is already underway.

Our other focus will be to support a Mat-Su where our children are safe and well-cared-for, not just by healthy families, but by everywhere they go throughout their day (schools, health care facilities, daycare, camps, sports activities, etc.). The goal will be to grow emotionally healthy children who will pass on this strength and steadiness to their children and future generations to come. By all working together we can have maximum impact in solving the health problems identified through the community health needs assessment process. We look forward to working with partners throughout the community as together we strive to help Mat-Su become the healthiest place in the U. S.

