

Community Health Visioning

Every other year health leaders from organizations in Greater Franklin County, such as the United Way of the Tri-Valley area, Franklin Community Health Network, University of Maine at Farmington, Healthy Community Coalition (HCC), the Health Leaders Forum and HealthReach Community Health Centers, sponsor a Community Health Visioning process. Administered by HCC, the purpose of the Visioning is to build widespread consensus on priorities for improving community health. This unique process engages residents and leaders alike in conversation about issues impacting health in its broadest scope as well as the resources available to address concerns and opportunities.

The Visioning process is a comprehensive one. We listen carefully to what the community is saying - more than 2,000 people were engaged in the last Visioning in 2006, the seventh in the last 14 years.

Visioning Forum Held

After an exhaustive survey process, a Community Health Visioning Forum was held on April 4, 2007 in the Bass Room at Franklin Memorial Hospital. More than 60 health leaders and community members gathered, despite the looming snowstorm, to chart the course for improved community health. Participants were welcomed by Leah Binder, Executive Director of Healthy Community Coalition (HCC) and Vice President, Franklin Community Health Network. Leah stressed the importance of the Community Health Visioning process, noting how this biennial process ensures that we are listening to the residents of our communities, and responsive to their concerns. She then introduced the priorities the community is mobilized to address through the Visioning process:

- expanding physical activity,
- improving nutrition,
- helping people gain access to health care, and
- improving economic stability.

Leah then welcomed Rev. Scott Planting who gave a moving keynote address that urged those in attendance to consider the power of collaboration and connection to each other. In addition, Rev. Planting encouraged those in attendance to weave together initiatives that address our health priorities to make an even bigger, and more profound, difference. He prompted the audience to consider how the Franklin Community College Network, for example, could incorporate physical activity into its curriculum, and how Franklin Health Access, for example, could promote improved nutrition through its efforts.

Rev. Planting also facilitated a stimulating roundtable discussion featuring leaders who are currently addressing the four identified priorities. The roundtable participants were:

Physical Activity

- Jim Toner, Director, UMF Fitness and Recreation Center
- Sandy Richard, Program Manager, Healthy Community Coalition

Nutrition

- Eileen Liddy, Program Associate, Healthy Community Coalition
- Tanya Swain, Executive Director, Western Mountains Alliance

Access to Health Care

- Connie Coggins, President/CEO, HealthReach Community Health Centers
- Charlie Woodcock, Director, Franklin Health Access

Economic Stability

- Marc Edwards, Tourism Economic Development Educator, University of Maine Cooperative Extension
- Doug Dunlap, Professor Rehabilitation Services, University of Maine, Farmington; pastor, Wilton First Congregational Church and member, Franklin County Community College Network
- Alison Hagerstrom, Executive Director, Greater Franklin Development Corporation

After hearing strengths as well as opportunities from the roundtable participants, the forum attendees broke into small groups related to each of the priorities. The charge of the small groups was to collectively arrive at a solution to address the identified problem, such as the lack of healthy eating choices in our schools. A leader was also to emerge from the group who agreed to continue working on the solution using a set of tools created by HCC staff. The following will be pursued as a result of the small group work:

Nutrition:

This task force is improving access and exposure to healthy foods to children in school by partnering with Hannaford, PTAs, 4-H, Coop Ext. and other groups. Focus is on creativity (such as family fun nights) and the introduction of new foods so when children are ultimately introduced to these foods through the school nutrition program – an ultimate goal, these foods will be welcomed. The group is actively working with University of Maine, Farmington by engaging student interns to achieve its goals. This fall, students in local schools were introduced to blueberry parfaits. Task force members, dressed in fruit and vegetable costumes, greeted a long line of children (and parents) at the door with this delicious and well-received treat. Linkage with the local foods initiatives of Western Mountains Alliance continues. In addition, the task force is working closely with MSAD 9 School Health Coordinator Alyce Cavanaugh to introduce a wider variety of healthy foods into the local school district, with plans to replicate how this was done in other area schools.

Economic Stability:

This task force is building on the success of the Franklin County Community College Network. Rather than form a new task force to address economic stability over the next two years, forum attendees decided to commit resources to strengthening the Franklin County Community College Network. There will be an emphasis on education and outreach as it pertains to letting those entering the workforce for the first time or re-entering a new career, know what financial resources and support services are currently available to help them in Greater Franklin County and across the state. (A no wrong door philosophy.) Courses are offered in collaboration with Central Maine Community College in Auburn. Significant work is being done in tandem with the development of a robust Community College system in Franklin County, including partnering with WorkReady programs (a 60-hour, no-cost program that helps individuals attain those foundational skills that employers look for), worksites, and College Transition Programs offered by MSAD 9 Adult and Community Education.

Access to Health Care:

This task force is developing a better means of educating the community about health care resources and the scope of services available in Greater Franklin County. It is designing a *system*

that focuses on improving access to health care using both technology and people. To meet its goals, the task force is focusing on the promotion of three services that can directly and indirectly improve access to health care in Greater Franklin County. These are:

- Franklin Health Access services, including access to health care services for the uninsured or underinsured
- The Prescription Assistance Program Coordinated by Franklin Health Access
- Transportation resources in Greater Franklin County

Understanding that both technology and grassroots efforts will be used, the group identified ten target populations that will be reached through a comprehensive outreach system. These populations include town clerks, realtors, beauticians, and clergy, among others. These populations will be informed, and by the nature of their connections to others they will provide appropriate information as needed, and thereby improve access to health care. A simple, accessible document is currently being created to use as part of this outreach effort.

Physical Activity:

This task force has identified numerous directions, but is seeking community leadership. The following initiatives are currently under consideration with varying levels of activity already taking place: Collaborating regionally with five area school districts and other parties (such as Northern Lights) to inventory equipment that is available for loaning out at low or no-cost; training students across the region to become personal fitness trainers (modeled after Mt. Abram's current efforts); capitalizing on the communities' request to organize more walking groups or group/family physical activity opportunities by coordinating those efforts; identifying comprehensive planning efforts throughout the region and encouraging sidewalks be incorporated into new or existing plans; and finally, the creation of a "Peak a Week" walking/hiking program in the northern tier of Franklin County. This takes advantage of the tremendous outdoor resources in the region, encourages physical activity, and provides the opportunity for families to participate together in activities.

In the last two years (2006 – 2008), significant progress has been made in addressing the four community health priorities identified in 2006. A few highlights of Task Force work and broader community efforts include:

Improving nutrition

- *Initiatives to promote local food were launched by Western Mountains Alliance and the Healthy Community Coalition*
- *Franklin Health Access actively worked to support diabetics, including offering a series of workshops that included nutrition education*
- *Local schools promoted healthy eating through School Health Coordinator activities such as a Healthy Bodies/Healthy Minds after school program, the Now You're Cooking Challenge, and tours of Hannaford Supermarkets where students learned about exotic fruits and the Guiding Stars program*
- *The Hope Harvest Community Garden in Farmington distributed thousands of pounds of fresh produce to nine area food pantries*

- *With the support of students from Foster Regional Technology Center, the Nutrition Task Force helped restore the greenhouse and gardens at Cascade Brook in order to grow fresh produce to integrate into the school lunch program*

Improving economic stability

- *The Franklin County Community College Network continued to expand its offerings in Greater Franklin County, offering affordable, accessible educational opportunities to area residents*
- *The Maine Development Foundation recognized Greater Franklin Development Corporation for its dedication to sustainable economic growth, with the Champions of Economic Development award*
- *A number of new businesses opened in the area, including Poland Springs and Notify MD*
- *The Berry family launched a 10-year, \$150 million expansion plan for Saddleback Mountain*
- *Richard Batt, Franklin Community Health Network President, announced that The Federal Communications Commission dedicated \$3.6 million for the construction of a regional broadband telehealth network under the Rural Health Care Pilot Program*

Expanding physical activity

- *Trails have been mapped throughout the region and are being promoted through interactive maps on the Community Connector website*
- *The Head Start program has incorporated low-impact physical activity into all its sites through an evidenced-based program called I Am Moving, I Am Learning*
- *Students have been involved in getting outdoors and identifying our region's recreational assets through workshops sponsored by the Center for Community GIS in Farmington*

Helping people gain access to health care

- *Franklin Community Health Network filled all open physician positions*
- *Complementary therapies, including reiki, massage, yoga, and chiropractic thrive in the region*
- *Franklin Health Access initiated the Franklin Health Access Rx Program. This program, which helps Greater Franklin County residents access free or low cost prescription medication, has saved residents over \$500,000 to date.*
- *With the support of the Maine Community Foundation, Access to Health Care Task Force members provided 150 kits to realtors, beauticians, town clerks, and many others throughout the region. The kits were designed to connect community members to resources to help with transportation, paying for medications or, accessing a medical provider.*

There is no substitute for the simple power of believing in ourselves as a community.