

Access to Health: It's Political
A community forum facilitated by 4C:
Campus Community Civic Collaborative



Executive Summary

A community discussion centered around community health was held on April 2nd by 4C (a joint partnership between the Fairfield Center and the James Madison University School of Communication Studies). This was put on as an event in the series of A Book for the Burg, a community wide reading program set up to encourage conversations across the community.

The book for this program was Mountains Beyond Mountains, a book that followed the story of Dr. Paul Farmer, a man who worked endlessly to cure TB in Haiti. He proves to be almost superhuman in nature as he risks his own health, his family, and his wealth to provide healthcare to this poor nation. This community discussion targeted the central focus of Mountains Beyond Mountains, community health and healthcare access.

This forum was intended to get the community talking about health in our own community- identifying strengths and weakness, and offering solutions on how to improve community health in the future. It was intended to cover a wide range of topics within health, from access to education to resources.

The conversation was researched, designed and facilitated by trained communications students from James Madison University enrolled in a course on Facilitating Public Engagement. They were responsible for designing the structure and ensuring that the conversation was carried out in a productive and thoughtful way. Forum Development Team: Danielle Barbarite, Chelsea Clark, Brittany Coffin, Andrew Crumpler, Lauren DiRuggiero, MaryBeth Fiedler, Alina Gasperino, Allison Gorga, Shelli Grogg, Scott Hill, Alex Husband, Joe Hwang, Maddie Irwin, Sam Kempter, Carter Kriz, Laura Mack, Mandy Maggio, Caroline Merry, Kelsey Moore, Collin Russell, Jessie Schnaible, Hayden Schrader, Laura Snyder, Kayla Thomas, Haylee Walker, Erica Wise, Brady Woolwine, Molly Zubrow.

Structure

The participants were broken down into small groups of 5-6 people, and included a combination of JMU students and community members. Each participant was given a handout with basic information to give them background knowledge on the issue at hand. The style of facilitation used was a fusion of many different models, including World Cafe and Appreciative Inquiry. The conversation started with a single question that all participants responded to and then allowed a free flow of ideas for the following questions.

Attendees

60 individuals attended representing various community organizations, and several departments and schools at JMU including communication studies, integrated health services and social work.

Central Question:

How can we educate and engage community members in all facets of healthcare and eliminate barriers to wellness, access to preventative and urgent care, and local resources in order to protect, promote and enhance quality of life for all?

Envisioning a Healthy Community- What does a healthy community look like?

During this part of the discussion individuals were encouraged to imagine what a healthy community would look like, without focusing too much on the Harrisonburg or JMU community specifically.

- Active
 - Physically- diet and exercise are important
 - Taking preventative measures
- Access- Having easy access to healthcare
- Having all your basic needs met and being able to access the resources you need
- Healthy relationships, and healthy emotional environment
- Education
- Sustainability
- Collaboration, Opportunity and Respect

“Where people can feel safe and happy with their healthcare and in their community.”

Identifying Strengths- What are we already doing well?

In an attempt to start the conversation in a positive direction each group was asked to identify aspects of health in Harrisonburg that are already supporting health.

- James Madison University resources
 - Students required to take health classes (learn basic skills, have to use University Recreation Facilities)
 - Health Center for students
 - Varner House- counseling service for students
- Harrisonburg Resources
 - Three health clinics (that have translators)- alternatives to ER
 - Shenandoah women's center- combatting high teen pregnancy rates
 - Med Express personal experience: efficient and welcoming, well organized
 - Senior centers- open three days a week, free meals and transportation
 - Rescue Squad- free for residents
 - Our Community Place- meals and temporary shelter for homeless individuals, have a nurse visit once a month
 - Churches that do clothing and food drives
- Access to lots of volunteers from JMU
- Moving towards a more sustainable way of life- Farmer's Market
- Great disaster response; if something tragic happens the community really pulls together

“The amount of alternatives to the ER are really good and the costs are not as high as the ER can be”

“There is a lot of support in the community; everyone is very willing to help and be philanthropic”

“Endless amount of volunteers; so many colleges in the area and students are always volunteering.”

“The fact that JMU is in the city it adds to the resources – economically and with professors who are educated in specific fields that could bring things into the community.”

Identifying Weaknesses- Where are there gaps or areas we need to address that are blocking us from getting to the healthy community we all envisioned?

This question began to get to the heart of the forum, participants were asked to examine in what areas there are shortcomings in Harrisonburg. Storytelling was encouraged, and participants were encouraged to critically examine the current circumstances of the community to identify where there are problems to address.

- Education
 - Lacking knowledge of how healthcare works
 - Don't know how to make healthy food choices
 - Misinformation being spread
 - Don't know all the resources that are available in Harrisonburg, or at JMU
 - Negative stigma attached to mental health
 - Make sure to market the resources to the right people in the right languages and via the most accessible vehicles. Get it to where people need it.
- Language barriers - harder to locate medical provider speaking a language other than English
- Transportation
 - Routes going from apartments, but not going from other places where there are people in need of medical attention.
 - Desire for more bus stops
 - Problem with the Pregnancy Center- free transportation with Yellow Cab for those with Medicare, but many immigrants don't have access to Medicare so cannot get this transportation opportunity
 - No transportation to healthier food stores
- Differences in the community- culture, language, distribution of wealth
- JMU volunteers-
 - Only here for four years, not consistent help
 - Many are only logging hours for requirements which makes them less dedicated or interested in actually helping
 - Still need to work on the relationship between the JMU and Harrisonburg community
- Not as many doctors to see the amount of patients in need
- Lack of preventative care- people are not going for regular checkups

“Doctors seem too busy to really help.”

“Students can be really passionate about something in Harrisonburg but they leave after four years and that passion dies.”

Moving Forward- What are some steps we as a community need to take?

This final question turned the discussion from abstract to more concrete. Participants offered suggestions and actual steps they believe the community can take to begin improving health.

- Bring awareness to those in power
 - Encourage not only community members, but JMU students to attend town hall meetings, etc.
- Build another Harrisonburg Community Health Center possibly downtown
- Increase public awareness and education of:
 - Healthier food options (ex: farm sharing at localharvest.org)
 - Medical payments (what exactly are we getting billed for when we are at the hospital)
 - Basic knowledge for the public- what medicine to take, when you need to go to the hospital, how to lower costs by doing free or cheap things
- Transportable services
 - Go to outlying areas with vans that offer these services, educate people about health and healthcare, as well as enroll them in programs.
- Transportation
 - Need more access to get to the medical centers- buses
 - Encourage biking or walking- better for environmental health, and physical health of those individuals
- Integration between JMU and the Harrisonburg community
 - Get JMU students more actively involved off-campus within the Harrisonburg community.
 - Share the various resources JMU has with the Harrisonburg community.
- Overcoming the language barrier
 - 24 hour hotline with a translator
 - Offering language classes to help individuals learn English, or Spanish
- Make sure that these resources have the capacity to help those that need to be served
- Need to give attention to mental health too
 - Get rid of negative stigma attached to mental illness
 - Creation of more programs to help those with mental health issues
 - At JMU, make sure students are being given resources to help them deal with the stress
- Build greenway/bike paths, parks, or walking paths
 - Would encourage multiple levels of health- emotional, social, physical, and environmental

“We need to get rid of the JMU bubble.”

“The resources are there - we just need to find a way to link them and get them to those who need them the most.”

When participants were asked who should receive a copy of this report summarizing the discussion, they responded with the following:

- Medical Providers
- Local government officials
- JMU’s Community Service Learning Office
- Nonprofits and advocates

Background Information

Participants at the forum were provided with background information based on research the facilitators conducted in the Harrisonburg community. The participant handout follows.

Access to Health: It's Political

A community forum facilitated by
4C: Campus Community Civic Collaborative

How can we educate and engage community members in all facets of healthcare and eliminate barriers to wellness, access to preventative and urgent care, and local resources in order to protect, promote and enhance quality of life for all?

As we consider this question together tonight, here is some information about health and healthcare in our country, in Virginia and in our community.



Defining Health

Health is the absence of disease, illness, and infirmity and the presence of physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being interconnected with a flourishing community and a healthy and safe environment.

The National Situation

You can't escape talk and perspectives about The Affordable Care Act which was designed to increase the quality, accessibility, and affordability of health insurance. In exchange most people who can afford to, must obtain health coverage by 2014 or pay a per month fee. The law eliminates pre-existing conditions, stops insurance companies from dropping you when you are sick, protects against gender discrimination, expands free preventative services and health benefits, expands Medicaid and CHIP, improves Medicare, mandates larger employers insure employees, creates a marketplace for subsidized insurance providing tens of millions individuals, families and small businesses with free or low-cost health insurance, and decreases healthcare spending and the deficit.

- The trouble is most people are still very confused about their options and the enrollment that was expected has not yet materialized. However, according to Daily News Record coverage, the website to enroll for health care is steadily increasing in the local area

In Virginia...

Virginia has several statewide programs to address the needs of some of the state's poorest and far-flung residents.

- The **State Rural Health Plan** supports strengthening the health care infrastructure in rural areas
- **FAMIS (Family Access to Medical Insurance Security)** Is Virginia's program that helps families provide health insurance to their children and pregnant women.
- **Plan First** is Virginia's free family planning program for men and women. Family Planning Services provide education and support to help you decide if or when you want to have a baby. Plan First offers FREE yearly family planning exams, contraceptives, lab testing, family planning education, and more.

- **Virginia Medicaid:** Eligible individuals primarily fall into particular eligibility categories such as low-income children, pregnant women, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and parents meeting specific low-income thresholds.
 - During state fiscal year (SFY) 2012, the monthly average number of individuals receiving Medicaid benefits in Virginia was 834,876 individuals with an annual total expenditure of approximately \$7.0 billion (approximately 49 % from federal funding).
 - Children and adult caregivers make up about 68 % of the Medicaid beneficiaries, but they account for only 31% of Medicaid spending.
 - The total number of individuals in Virginia who received Medicaid benefits at any time during SFY 2012 was 1,096,470 and was comprised of:
 - 604,442 children,
 - 195,681 parents or caregivers of children and pregnant women,
 - 79,613 elderly individuals, and
 - 216,734 individuals with a disability
- Local problem: Virginia hasn't decided whether to expand Medicaid coverage. A Virginia committee has been formed to examine possible Medicaid expansion that would happen this summer.

Harrisonburg and The Valley: The Local View of Health

From the 2010 Health Community Council Assessment

- Teen pregnancy rates for 15 to 17 year olds decreased in the City and County.
- More Non-Latino adults and seniors are exercising at least five days a week.
- Uninsured visits to Rockingham Memorial Hospital Emergency Department decreased slightly over the past four years.
- The addition of the federally funded Harrisonburg Community Health Center, which opened in January 2009, offered more health care alternatives to the region's uninsured and underinsured. In 2009, the Community Health Center (CHC) served 2,998 patients with 9,025 visits. In addition a second location opened on Port Republic Road in 2013.
- Fewer adults perceived themselves as healthy compared to previous years. This is consistent with a state trend.

Talking with community members ...

We conducted some stakeholder interviews with community members who are connected to health or healthcare. Some perspectives these interviewees offered:

- There is a lack of availability of health care despite implementation of the Affordable Health Care Act.
- Many felt that there is an increase in the amount of drug traffic along the route 81 corridors.
- All stakeholders felt that costs and lack of staff at health facilities was a major challenge the Harrisonburg community faces
- The perception is that we are doing well as a whole with community outreach and preventative care.
- Communication between all partners needs to be consistent and all groups need to work towards a single goal of affordable healthcare for all as opposed to the fighting and bickering that is going on.
- Virginia has done a state assessment by county/region to identify specific issues. Community leaders are taking the initiative to set goals to address those issues. They believe that those communities need to work with the healthcare providers and hospitals together to promote health in the community.