

Physical and Mental Health Subcommittee
April 24, 2006

The Physical and Mental Health subcommittee convened on April 26th with more than 50 participants present. In the initial meeting on March 27, the group had expressed that it would be helpful to determine the “community assets,” in other words, what health services are currently available to the uninsured and underinsured in the community. Several groups, selected at random by the health steering committee, were invited to provide a brief overview of their services. Those presenting were: Dr. Diane Dunston, Athens Neighborhood Health Center; Dr. Ola Jennings Simmons, Clarke County Health Department; Dr. Paul Buczynsky, Mercy Health Center; Julie Schumacher, ARMC – Midwifery Clinic; Shelby Lacy, Athens Nurses Clinic; and Helen Kabot, Advantage Behavioral Health. Those present were also provided with a handout describing the services of these providers and of several others. As we proceed, it will be helpful to continue this review of community assets, determining what is needed to better meet the physical and mental health needs of the uninsured and underinsured.

Matt Bishop of the Fanning Institute presented a brief overview of data that has been collected to date. Highlighted information included the high teen pregnancy rate in Athens-Clarke County for 15 to 17 year olds. The county ranks 131 out of 159 counties with 61.2 pregnancies per one thousand 15 to 17 year olds, more than 20 pregnancies higher than the state average. Over 27% of those teens giving birth will have a second child before the age of 20.

Following the data presentation, the group divided into “population” groups to begin to focus the scope of work. Six groups - Adults, Elderly, Homeless, Children and Adolescents, Disabled and Chronically Ill, and Pregnancy and Infant Health – were created and the participants self-selected a population group to focus on. Groups were provided with a scope of work list, created in the first meeting, of health issues facing the uninsured and underinsured. A number of items, such as language barriers, were pulled out of the distributed list because it is an all-encompassing issue, not particular to one group. The issues that cross over all groups will be looked at separately. The information is not lost and will not be ignored as those issues that affect a broader spectrum of the uninsured and underinsured are very important in finding solutions to health issues.

Groups were asked to cut the list of 32 issues down to ten, and then select the top five affecting their particular population. Many of the groups combined issues as they felt the interconnection was important and should not be discounted. Following are the populations and their associated physical and mental health priorities as presented by each group.

Adults: Access to care (primary, chronic, specialty and prescriptions); Transportation; Mental health (substance abuse, suicide prevention); Health education and prevention (nutrition, obesity, smoking cessation); and Vision and dental.

Elderly: Access to primary care; Chronic illness care; Dental care; Nutrition; and Transportation to health providers.

Homeless: Mental health services and treatment; Substance abuse; Access to primary care; Access to affordable, health foods; and Domestic violence (both perpetrators and survivors).

Children and Adolescents: Pregnancy prevention and sex education; Mental health services/treatment, substance abuse and suicide prevention; Obesity and healthy living; Family relationship and life skills; and Child abuse and neglect.

Disabled and Chronically Ill: Chronic illness care (follow-up visits); Prescription assistance; Mental health, substance abuse, suicide prevention; Transportation; and Dental care.

Pregnancy and Infant Health: Prenatal care; Access to primary care/health care/non prenatal and immunizations; Nutrition/obesity/healthy, affordable foods; Transportation; and Family issues/child abuse/sex education/domestic violence/pregnancy prevention.

The population groups did express an interest in meeting outside of the regularly scheduled Partners for a Prosperous Athens meetings, and we will create email lists for each group so they might communicate with each other. The most important factor in these independent meetings will be capturing the information and ensuring that it is consolidated into the larger Physical and Mental Health Subcommittee work. The group was also concerned with the need to hear from those who are uninsured and underinsured as to what they consider their most pressing physical and mental health needs. Developing a survey to be utilized by current providers to capture this information was one suggestion.

The meeting concluded with the announcement of the next meeting date and location, May 22nd, 7:00pm at Clarke Central High School. The group hopes to hear a presentation from a model program that has seen great success in providing health services to the uninsured and underinsured as well as continue working in the population groups to determine needs as we work towards solutions.