

# Healthy Carolinians of Macon County

Summary of Community  
Interviews and Focus Groups

*January 24, 2007*

# Interview List

Carlos Vargas, MD, Physician  
Sam Greenwood, County Manager  
Don Sandoval, Angel Hospital  
Carolyn Steed, Angel Hospital  
Kenneth Shull, Highlands Hospital  
Mark Leonard, Westcare  
Sheila Price, Westcare  
Dorothy Crawford, Seniors' Advocate  
Ken Ring, Macon Co. Health Dept.  
Jane Kimsey, Macon Co. DSS  
Mike Neidig, Mental Health Provider  
Edda Bennett, Latino Outreach  
Nancy Ritter, WMC Language Alliance  
Pedro Ruiz, MPP

Joe Collins, Mayor of Franklin  
Don Mullins, Mayor of Highlands  
Barbara McRae, The Franklin Press  
Kathy McGaha, HCMC  
Chris Baldwin, Nantahala School  
David Folsbee, Nantahala Community  
Alisa Ashe, Kid's Place  
Joe Whittenton, Smoky Mt. Center  
Jim Davis, DDS  
Jeff King, Baptist Association  
Jerry Hermanson, Highlands Clinic  
Ginger Slaughter, Highlands Clinic

# The Focus Groups

- School Health Advisory Council
- Franklin High School Students
- Business Health Group
- Mental Health Professionals
- Hispanic Community Leaders

# Identified Priorities

Changing major health indicators  
Improved access to health care  
Strengthening and supporting families  
Legislative advocacy  
Senior services & long term care for the elderly  
Impact youth risky behavior  
Mental health

*from initial steering committee meeting*

# Community Voices

## Access To Primary Care

- Creating access for the poor and uninsured adults is a high priority for community and social services leaders, but not for government and business.
- Problems with access are *below the surface*.
- Hispanic community, largely unseen to many, represents hard-to-define unmet need.
- Highlands Clinic and Health Department reduce the pressure.

# Community Voices

## Access To Primary Care

- About 45% of patients at Highlands Clinic are from Franklin.
- Franklin has no similar clinic because there is no effective leadership to make it happen.
- Physicians reluctant to take Medicaid contribute to the access problem.
- About 500 are currently enrolled in medical assistance program run by Angel.
- Many who need help with access and meds are working poor or temporarily out of work.

# Community Voices

## Health Care System Issues

- Many see the competition between Angel and Westcare as good for the community.
- Some see competition as disruptive, and in the long run bad for the community.
- Loss of orthopedic services at Angel diminishes emergency care, especially trauma.
- Area health system needs specialists and additional primary care.
- Lack of cooperation in medical community makes recruitment and retention more difficult.

# Community Voices

## Health Care System

- Hospital call coverage is a major issue that is changing patterns of care.
- Highlands-Cashiers Hospital priority needs include general surgeon, nursing staff.
- Health department provides essential primary care and preventative health role in a quality setting.
- Molar Roller is a community success story.
- Access to dental care is more acute problem than medical care, especially for low income adults.



# Community Voices

## Senior Care Issues

- There are two types of seniors--baby boomers and the aging frail.
- Many believe county is not planning effectively for impact of aging population.
- Long term care facilities are full, but access does not yet seem critical.
- Greater need is for non-nursing home care and support services.

# Community Voices

## Senior Care Issues

- Isolation is a major concern, especially for rural elderly.
- There are limitations to M.A.T.S., yet it seems to meet minimum needs.
- Churches and neighbors pick up the slack.
- Access to dental care for elderly is potential growing problem.

# Community Voices

## Behavioral Health Care

- “Appalling . . .”
- “Fails totally . . .”
- “A nightmare . . .”
- “Inhumane . . .”
- “Mental Health deform, not reform . . .”
- “A bureaucratic mess . . .”
- “The state needs to start over . . .”

# Community Voices

## Behavioral Health Care

- Many have difficulty accessing the system, even if they have financial resources.
- Problems with reform getting a little better . . . but bitterness remains.
- Serious lack of licensed mental health workers.
- Access is maddening for the Sheriff's office.
- 1 to 2 week wait for a social worker.
- 1 to 2 month wait for a psychiatrist.
- Access for children is far better.
- Is there a suicide epidemic?

# Community Voices

## Substance Abuse

- At same time behavioral health resources are decreasing, substance abuse is rising.
- Meth is affecting many aspects of Macon County life -- children, schools, law enforcement.
- Some see role for churches to respond with counseling with 12-step programs, but professionals are scarce.

# Community Voices

## Family & Youth Issues

- Fully funded school nurses is a model program.
- Behavior at school is less of an issue in Macon County than in other areas.
- Youth risky behavior is a reality--sex, drugs, alcohol and tobacco are visible problems.
- There is no meaningful sex education.
- Youth obesity is a problem.

# Community Voices

## Youth Issues

- School nutrition program has been a problem in the past, but is getting new attention.
- There is some emerging gang activity, but it is not taken seriously.
- Teens want safe and fun places to gather, and Fun Factory is not it.
- Some parents are disconnected, tuned out.
- Teens want, see the need for, family time.

# Community Voices

## Health Indicators

- Obesity among children and adults is a major health problem.
- Inactivity is also a concern.
- The county has invested in parks and greenways to encourage exercise.
- Heart disease, cancer and stroke are top health concerns.



# Community Voices

## Hispanic Community

- We believe in the American dream, but illegal aliens should not be here.
- The county is not prepared. They hoped this problem would go away.
- “Horrendous” increase in health department prenatal clinic.
- They need care--who knows what diseases they could be introducing into our community?

# Community Voices

## Hispanic Community

- Language is a huge barrier. Most employers and services have not invested the effort to translate important information.
- There is no local Spanish language media.
- The transportation system will pick them up, but you have to schedule a ride and there is no one who speaks Spanish to answer the phone.

# Community Voices

## Hispanic Community

- Many illegals do not seek care because they fear deportation. But that rarely happens.
- The health department has two interpreters and two Hispanic dentists.
- Interpreters are a continual need at the Highlands Clinic.