

Public Life Foundation of Owensboro
Health Care Initiatives
(August 2000 - April 2009)

Health Needs Assessment

In 2000, the foundation was the initiating sponsor of a regional (seven-county) health needs assessment conducted by the University of Kentucky Center for Health Services Management and Research. Two priority issues emerged from the study: health care access; behaviors and lifestyles. At that time, health care access appeared to be getting less community attention than lifestyle issues; consequently, health care access was the initial follow-up focus.

People's Health Project

The UK results were adapted into a dialogue guide and, over a period of 18 months, trained volunteer facilitators conducted 52 public forums throughout the community: schools, churches, community centers, fire stations, and more. The objective: to complement the data in the UK study with personal experiences. Results and analysis of these forums were included in the 2002 report *All Is Not Well: Citizens Speak Out About Health Care in Daviess County*.

Advocacy Group

Following the report on the forums, the foundation convened a core group of participants who were interested in staying involved. We helped them examine options, organize, prepare articles of incorporation and by-laws, develop a mission statement and program ideas. The group became Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA). We trained leaders and facilitated retreats. We provided office space and a part-time executive director while allowing them to be an autonomous organization.

Now in their seventh year, CHCA has approximately 115 members and more than 500 other citizens have attended the organization's meetings. CHCA meetings are broadcast on public access television and have become a premiere forum for health care in our community.

CHCA meetings typically feature a speaker or panel discussion on a current health care topic-issue facing our community. CHCA members ask tough questions. They push for improved health care for the underserved. CHCA programs have examined the nursing shortage, health care costs, the dissolution of the midwife program by the health department, substance abuse, a cigarette tax increase proposal, needs of the uninsured, and much more.

CHCA presents two awards: one to honor health care professionals who provide compassionate care for the uninsured; another to honor citizens outside the field who have made significant contributions to health care.

Much of our foundation work in health care is now relegated to CHCA.

CHCA is not only accomplishing things as an organization, it is developing leaders who are better prepared to get involved in related initiatives. For example, several CHCA leaders were key leaders in the ODC-Smoke Free initiative that led to a countywide ordinance to restrict smoking in public places.

Directories

Recognizing the difficulty many people have in navigating the health care delivery system, in 2002, the foundation published directories on primary care and community health centers to identify which physicians and walk-in clinics accept Medicare, Medicaid, and uninsured patients – and under what circumstances.

The directories have been updated by Audubon Area Community Services and are used routinely by social workers, public health workers, medical office managers, ministers, and others who direct people to sources of care.

Prescription Drugs

When prescription drug costs emerged as one of the most pressing citizen concerns from our health care forums, our foundation commissioned a report on the topic to identify models for community-based initiatives: *Paying for Prescriptions: The high cost of drugs and what we can do about it*, published in 2002.

Subsequently, we formed a Prescription Drug Task Force that developed a model for a Community Prescription Drug Service Center that was largely incorporated into a broader health care access program developed by a three-way partnership involving the health department, county government, and hospital.

The foundation also made grants to the McAuley Clinic and the Free Clinic to enhance their capacity to provide prescription drugs to their uninsured patients. This included a computer software program to expedite the eligibility process for patients who qualify for prescription drug assistance programs.

Health Insurance

Upon learning that state employees and teachers in our community pay much higher insurance premiums than other areas of Kentucky, in 2003 we commissioned a report to get to the bottom of it: *Health Insurance Premiums in Daviess County: Why do we pay more than other Kentuckians? What can we do about it?*

Since then, a different provider entered the market, secured the state employee-teacher contract, offered considerably lower premiums, but then lost the contract a year later.

The primary causes of high premiums in our community (high utilization, high provider charges, etc.) will continue to drive the cost of insurance premiums in the future.

The report was updated in the article, “Does health care still cost more in Owensboro than other places?” by Fran Ellers (*Public Life Advocate*, Jan. 2007, Vol. 4, Issue 1)

Medical Transportation

The foundation organized a citizen task force on medical transportation which, through the help of Audubon Area Community Services, led to the development of an enhanced computer system to coordinate the best available transportation options for those in need of such services. Medical office managers, social workers, and others frequently use the system.

Health Care Access Program

In 2000, the foundation sponsored a presentation by a representative of an Asheville, North Carolina health care access program that subsequently became the prototype for the DC-CAP (Daviness County Community Access Project) program designed by the health department, county government, and OMHS. An executive director was hired, physicians were recruited, and space was provided in a new health department facility. Through DC-CAP, primary care physicians share the burden of uninsured patients and provide a medical home for qualifying patients. Cards are issued, care is coordinated and tracked, transportation and prescription drug assistance is provided.

Currently, 107 physicians are enrolled (more than half the physicians in Daviness County), representing 22 specialties. In 2008, the 248 program participants received more than \$2 million in care through 1180 office visits and used the emergency room 30 percent less than in 2007.

Hospital Buyout/Public Accountability

The foundation took a keen interest in the Owensboro-Daviness County Hospital (parent entity of Owensboro Mercy Health System) buyout of the Mercy system and the subsequent governance restructuring. We urged a thorough and open public process to ensure ample opportunity for the public to understand and examine the options facing the OMHS and ODCH boards.

Subsequently, ODCH, Inc. purchased the Mercy interest for \$36 million. ODCH, Inc. dissolved, and OMHS remained a private, nonprofit entity. Consequently, the hospital is no longer subject to open meetings-open records laws, but it agreed to make one public presentation per year.

Community Summit on Healthy Lifestyles

Healthy Horizons, organized and supported by OMHS, represents an extensive cross-section of health and community leaders who focus on ways to improve health and healthy lifestyles. The foundation proposed that Healthy Horizons join with other community groups in organizing a Community Summit on Healthy Lifestyles. Benchmarks were identified to assess our current health standing. Goals were established connected with nutrition, fitness and smoking. The summit attracted approximately 200 people for a half-day Saturday event.

Several years later, action teams continue to report to Healthy Horizons on programs to promote healthy lifestyles in homes and neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, civic groups, churches, and other settings.

Articles

The foundation has published articles on the midwife program cuts, substance abuse, presidential health care proposals, medical malpractice, a proposed clean air ordinance, the future of clinics and more.

Issue Briefs/Dialogue Guides

The foundation has published several discussion guides on health care issues for use in public forums on topics such as:

- Care for the uninsured
- Should we pass a clean air ordinance?
- Should OMHS build a new hospital?
- Dental care for disadvantaged youth
- Prenatal care for the poor
- Coal-fired power plants

Dental Clinic

Several years ago, the foundation took a lead role in convening dental professionals, social workers, and other concerned citizens to examine the issue of youth dental care. Community models were introduced, speakers were brought in, and through the leadership of the Green River District Health Department, an effort was launched to establish a dental clinic to serve our community and region. More than \$250,000 has been raised and a clinic will soon open in Mayfair Square office complex. Another Hager family charitable fund (The Progeny Fund) has been a lead sponsor.