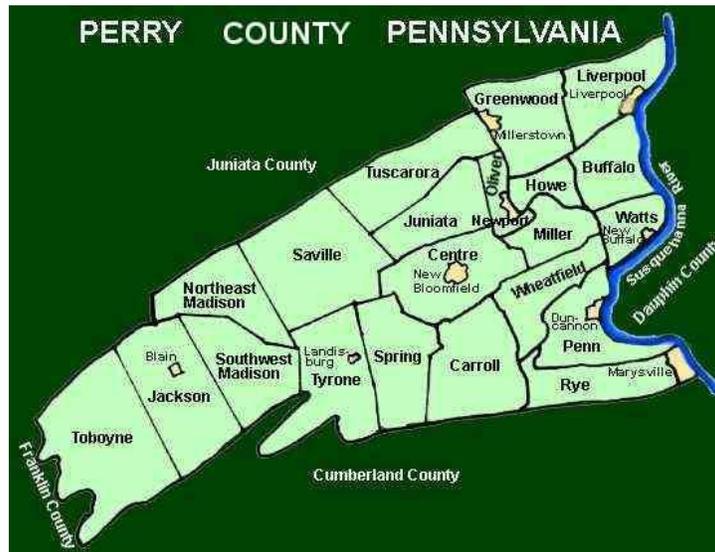


Perry County Health Coalition Health Care Access Study

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Overview

In comparison to urban and suburban communities, rural America is at a significant disadvantage when it comes to accessing quality and affordable health care. Consistent with that generalization, people who live in rural Perry County experience many health-related challenges that are both distinct and more complex than those of nearby urban and suburban communities.

In light of growing concerns about the health of local residents, the Perry County Health Coalition (Coalition), which consists of organizations from the government, non-profit, and for-profit sectors, was formed in early 2013. The primary long-term goal of the Coalition is to improve health conditions among Perry County residents. To this end the Coalition commissioned a countywide health care market study for the purposes of providing a detailed analysis of factors that influence health conditions in Perry County, and recommendations on possible actions and initiatives that may help to improve health conditions in the county, in the intermediate and long-term future.

The Health Market Analysis included: a survey of 547 community residents, a survey of 27 health professionals, in-depth interviews, focus groups, an inventory of all major health service providers in the county and geographic mapping of health needs and services. A summary of the findings and recommendations are provided below.

The Current State of Health Care Access in Perry County

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's comprehensive model of population health ranks Perry County 44th for overall health outcomes among 67 counties in Pennsylvania. Perry County also ranks 25th among Pennsylvania's 67 counties on a weighted measure of factors that determine overall health outcomes. Factors incorporated in the measurement include health behavior, social and economic factors, clinical care and the physical environment.

Access to health care services, particularly clinical care, is fundamental to a population's health and well-being. Perry County's clinical care ranking of 54 among 67 counties clearly and negatively impacts the county's overall health care outcomes. Health Care Access Risk, *defined as a measure of the relative need for health care combined with the relative difficulty in accessing care*, varies across the county. Three service areas were developed for this study: they are Western, Northeastern and Southeastern¹. Residents of the Western Service Area are most vulnerable, and those of the Southeastern Service Area are least vulnerable to Health Care Access Risk.

Health care resources (medical, dental, and mental health) within the county are below state averages on a provider to population basis. Services are additionally constrained by the scale and hours of operation of many practices; limited capacity to absorb new patients because of existing demand; and selectivity of practices with respect to accepting new clients.

Furthermore, there are substantial mismatches between where county residents at greatest health care access risk reside and the way health care services are currently distributed. The table below illuminates the ratio of physicians and dentists to local residents, across three regions.

Ratios	Southeastern	Northeastern	Western
Residents to Physicians	1,816: 1	2,291: 1	3,266: 1
Residents to Dentists	9,082: 1	2,546: 1	4,900: 1

Perceptions of Health Care Access in Perry County

Perry County residents were asked to document factors that affected their access to health care services. These factors were divided between *attractors* (those aspects of the health care experience that act as reinforces, creating a positive access memory); and *barriers* (those aspects that prevented one from achieving care or a positive access experience). Residents were also asked to identify any new or *desired health care services*.

Among the most important *attractors*, residents expressed the desire for health care providers who are caring, competent, communicative, responsive and affordable across three categories of services (medical, dental, mental health). The identification of *barriers* spoke directly to the current state of health care access in the county; that is, one characterized by insufficient and difficult to access health care resources. Leading barriers commonly identified across health care services include: “Do not know where to go for needed services”; “Location of health care office/center”; “Out of pocket costs”; “Office hours”; and “Availability of appointments.”

Resident responses for new and additional services are a direct response to the current availability, accessibility, and affordability of health care services in the county. Residents included “Urgent Care,” “Family Practice,” “Women’s Health Services” and “Dental Care” among their top choices.

Strategic Recommendations to the Perry County Health Coalition

Our major recommendations emphasize ways to strengthen *attractors* and reduce *barriers* to accessing health care, and to take steps to *introduce desired services*. Recommendations are divided among six themes outlined below.

1. **Gain Broad Support for Shared Planning & Investments**
Disseminate findings and gain support for improved health care access from an array of community stakeholders. Pursue efforts to develop and strengthen a creative and interdisciplinary network of service providers, especially to enhance proactive care for those county residents at greatest risk.
2. **Improve Health Literacy**
Create new and/or promote existing community programs designed to improve resident’s ability to obtain, process and understand basic health information. Provide training to all health care professionals in Perry County so that they can assist in improving health literacy in the community.

3. **Cultivate & Recruit New Providers**

Complete comprehensive countywide medical and dental professional recruitment planning documents and support current efforts to recruit medical and dental professionals. Strengthen scholarship programs for students expressing an interest in the health care professions.

4. **Expand & Strengthen Existing Services**

Work with “key” practicesⁱⁱ on ways to right-size and grow their respective practices to best adapt medical home, integrated behavioral health/physical medicine, and extended-hours-of-care service models, in addition to growing their offerings of primary care sub-specialties. Leverage existing county health care services by using, for example county EMS units, to assist in monitoring the health status of willing county residents identified as being at greatest health risk.

5. **Support New Medical & Dental Providers**

With representatives of the three health systems currently serving Perry County (Carlisle Regional Medical Center, Holy Spirit Health System, and Pinnacle Health System) engage in conversations about the possibilities of creating at strategic locations throughout the County: (a) an urgent care center; and/or (b) retail clinics. In collaboration with an interested community health center, support the opening of a satellite facility dedicated to primary care in the western service area, and one dedicated to dental care in the northeastern service area.

6. **Cultivate New Behavioral Health Services**

With support from the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute, Holy Spirit System’s Behavioral Health Services, and the NHS Stevens Center, pursue the establishment of satellite offices dedicated to behavioral health at all three “key” primary care locations. Over time, support the development of an integrated behavioral health/physical medicine model of care at all three “key” primary care locations.

ⁱ Municipalities in each region are as follows: Western Region (Boroughs [Blain and Landisburg] Townships [Jackson, Northeast Madison, Saville, Southwest Madison, Spring, Toboyne, and Tyrone]); Northeastern Region (Boroughs [Bloomfield, Liverpool, Millerstown, New Buffalo, and Newport] Townships [Buffalo, Centre, Greenwood, Howe, Juniata, Liverpool, Miller, Oliver, Tuscarora, and Watts]); Southeastern Region (Boroughs [Duncannon and Marysville] Townships [Carroll, Penn, Rye, and Wheatfield]).

ⁱⁱ Three family practices are identified as “key” primary care medical practices within Perry County. This designation is based on their respective concentration of services; locations with the county; and potential access to operational and financial resources. These practices are the Family Practice Center PC (Loysville), Pinnacle Health Family Care (Newport), and Holy Spirit Health System Family Medicine (Duncannon).