



source: Oregon Public Health Institute

HEALTH & WELLNESS STUDY TEAM 2017

What is Health and Wellness?

Health and wellness is the state of physical, mental and social well-being; not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It is a result of enough sleep, a healthy diet, regular exercise, stable housing, a sense of safety and community, and access to culturally appropriate healthcare.

How are We Doing?

Our region has an array of public and private hospitals, medical professionals, insurers, and community health organizations working to treat medical, dental, and behavioral problems. But there are key gaps to access in our region, with many having a devastating effect on people of color, undocumented individuals, and those trapped in poverty. For a region that is rich with food, nonprofits, and human resources, we can do better.

Nearly every conversation had with experts regarding health and wellness brought us back to the debilitating effects of unstable housing and homelessness. Because the Family Services study group is reporting on that issue, we are focusing on the other areas of health and wellness that were brought to our attention through extensive research and interviews, including access to:

- Dental/Oral Healthcare
- Mental/Behavioral Healthcare
- Coordinated Care
- Culturally Appropriate Care

Dental/Oral Healthcare

“Oregon children have among the worst oral health in the nation. Because of poverty, lack of access to care, and other social and economic issues, Oregon children suffer more dental pain and infection than children in almost any other state.”* Because of this, they miss school and suffer from pain while being at risk of serious health issues.

Numerous programs exist throughout the region to provide limited dental care and screening, but data is poorly maintained and children are served on a hit-and-miss basis. There are programs to screen them or to provide toothbrushes and toothpaste, but more comprehensive care and preventive care through education are not the norm. A bright light in this area is the Dental Foundation of Oregon, which advocates for policy changes, partners with multiple organizations to reach the largest number of children through public schools via their Tooth Taxi, provides an oral health curriculum for kids from Early Head Start through 12th grade, teaches prenatal classes at hospitals, and is a partner with the OHSU School of Dentistry as a pediatric rotation.

*Dental Foundation of Oregon

Mental/Behavioral Healthcare

The most eye-opening things we learned about mental health:

- Only 1–3% of the mentally ill are chronic sufferers of psychiatric conditions, but one in five people will experience mental illness at some point in their lives and this is not limited to those experiencing poverty.
- Poor mental health is very often the result of poverty and unstable living conditions rather than the cause.
- Because people suffering from poor mental health and their families have been stigmatized, they and their families don't advocate for themselves/them and this can limit receipt of care. Many individuals have insurance that provides for mental healthcare, but they are too ashamed to access it.
- Although the Affordable Care Act has been the best thing for mental health (as it is considered an essential health benefit), individuals who remain uninsured still struggle with access to mental healthcare due to the cost.

Working hard in the region to address this area of great concern are many small organizations: the Unity Center for Behavioral Health, which provides emergency psychiatric care and recovery services for people 18 and over who are experiencing a mental health crisis; LifeWorks Northwest, where you can get help with prevention, mental health care, and addiction treatment; and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), which advocates for integrated health care, provides education for families of those suffering from mental illness, and offers support groups and referral services.

Coordinated Care

Coordinated care takes place when two or more participants involved in a patient's care facilitate the appropriate delivery of healthcare services.

Public and private agencies are in the process of creating “accountable communities of care” that coordinate services across physical health, mental health, and social services—hospitals, doctors, community groups, and other services. The models are complex financially and in practice. The Gladstone Center for Children and Families is an example of coordinated care that is getting results.

Culturally Appropriate Access to Care

Much of healthcare is culturally specific—think Chinese teas and acupuncture as forms of Oriental medicine. When individuals are ill, they desire care from someone they can understand and trust who will treat them using the acceptable practices of their culture. This is where Health Navigators come in and play a huge role in directing people to appropriate care. Many medical facilities provide such navigators, but they are needed in additional settings to get more people to the right services.

The Healthy Living Collaborative in Clark County brings public and private groups together to ensure access to appropriate care. They have Community Workers who come from similar backgrounds to the people they serve and understand them, and who can build trust and address myths and stereotypes that may get in the way of accessing care in our region.

I think the biggest problem with healthcare today is not its cost—which is a big problem—but for all that money, it's not an expression of our humanity.

—Jonathan Bush, CEO, athenahealth