



AFFORDABLE MEDICAL AND DENTAL CARE ACTION TEAM REPORT

Affordable Medical and Dental Care

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For more information about
the needs assessment
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For more detail about the
action team's discussions, key
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please request the complete
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Background

The *Washington Facing the Future Report*¹ notes several statewide trends in health care affordability. The cost of health insurance is rising and fewer people can afford it, leading to a rise in uninsured and underinsured. Fewer employers can afford to provide health insurance. There are middle income working persons whose jobs don't include health insurance benefits and small business owners and self-employed persons who have trouble finding affordable plans. There are people who have Medicaid benefits, but can't find doctors or dentists who will serve them. The largest component of rising costs is prescription drugs.

Financial pressures are mounting for a significant portion of primary care providers, who are more dependent on public revenues than specialists. Payments from Healthy Options and Basic Health may not cover overhead. A Primary Care Access Survey² in Kitsap County conducted in August 2003 by the Washington State Department of Health includes information regarding the per cent of primary physicians accepting patients by payer: 22% do not accept insured patients; 60% do not accept Medicaid Fee For Services; 55% do not accept Medicaid Healthy Options; 45% do not accept Medicare Fee For Services; 61% do not accept Medicare Managed Care; and 48% do not accept patients under the Basic Health Plan.

Needs Assessment focus group participants stressed the importance of better and more affordable medical and dental options; better accessibility to health care and family planning services on the Island; and for seniors, accessibility to hospital care and off island medical specialist services. Most seniors did not have any problems getting their prescriptions but they were concerned about rising costs and co-pays in the future.

Key Findings

- **Affordable dental care is a challenge for some individuals and families.**
It is difficult for families using Medicaid or who have low incomes to obtain dental care in Kitsap County. Children who use Medicaid, are served by local dentists and the SmileMobile Dental Van. Most challenged are:
 - ❖ children whose families carry private insurance with high deductibles or no dental coverage;
 - ❖ uninsured or underinsured adults, including those with high deductibles;
 - ❖ uninsured or underinsured seniors.
- **A Bainbridge dental referral system is feasible.**
It is possible to implement a local dental referral system. Local dentists have begun to develop the process and Helpline House will coordinate the referral process.

Key Findings, *continued*

- **There are many health services available to local residents, but knowing about the services, how to access them, insurance coverage, transportation, and other issues can pose challenges.**

Virginia Mason Clinic Winslow is the largest medical provider on Bainbridge Island. Virginia Mason is not taking new Medicaid clients, but does take new Medicare clients. Bainbridge Island Family Care Clinic offers Family and Women's Health Care, and Kitsap County Health District offers immunizations and family planning pill refills. Private health services providers, Mary Bridge Children's Services, Peninsula Community Health Clinic and Dental Clinic, and Harrison Memorial Hospital are county providers. Supportive services include Helpline House, First Steps, and the Lion's Club for eyeglasses.

- **A low cost health clinic would be beneficial for Island residents.**
Helpline House notes most medical referrals are for brief services. Referrals for clients with chronic diseases who need low cost medical care and those needing prescriptions can be difficult. Peninsula Community Health Services, a non-profit agency, provides medical and pharmacy services for the uninsured and underinsured as well as private pay patients, and would be welcomed by local providers to operate at the existing Health District Commons site.
- **More accessible and affordable mental health and counseling services are needed.**
Helpline House reports some clients have mental health concerns that require ongoing medical management and medications. Some counseling is available through Helpline's Family Counseling Program and Kitsap Mental Health Services. Care for clients with more severe mental health problems is challenging to secure.
- **Changes in Medicaid will dramatically affect health services clients and service providers.**
Decreases in the number of persons covered and co-pays for children during 2004 will affect clients and services, especially for children.
- **A medical referral system similar to the dental referral system is worthy of discussion.**
The development of a medical referral system that includes physical health, mental health, and assists in meeting prescription needs, expanding on Helpline House's current system, should be explored.

ACTION TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Develop a dental referral system**
Develop a dental referral system to serve low-income adults and children with services provided by local dentists and dental hygienists. Referrals and statistics will be managed by Helpline House. Local dentists and Helpline House plan to have a system in place by July 2004.
- **Support a new Peninsula Community Health Clinic on Bainbridge Island**
Support a new health clinic to open August 2004 at the Kitsap County Health District location in the Commons. Consider how HHHS might support publicity and fund development efforts.
- **Improve the current Island medical referral system**
Improve provision of health services including mental health services and prescription assistance mechanisms among service providers. Helpline House, Virginia Mason Medical Clinic--Winslow, and Willa Fisher, MD, MPH will work together to move this recommendation forward.
- **Maintain ongoing communication process among medical and dental practitioners**
Create an e-mail communication among providers and continue to meet regularly. Lead organizations include Helpline and healthcare providers involved in referral system.

¹ Facing the Future: The State of Human Services in Washington, 2002. Washington State Department of Social & Health Services.

² 2001 Washington State Primary Care Provider Survey. Washington State Department of Health.