



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
WYANDOTTE

Recommendations for a Better Future



Acknowledgments

Recommendations for a Better Future

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Unified Government of Wyandotte County / KCK Wyandot, Inc. Project EAGLE	Parents as Teachers Juniper Gardens Children's Project Cultivate Kansas City
Kansas State University Research and Extension Community Health Council of Wyandotte County REACH Healthcare Foundation	Mental Health America of the Heartland Douglas County Dental Clinic Duchesne Clinic
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Kansas City, Kansas Community College Turner Parks and Recreation Kansas City, Kansas Housing Authority Downtown Shareholders – Kansas City, Kansas USD 500 – Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools USD 202 – Turner School District USD 203 – Piper School District USD 204 – Bonner Springs/Edwardsville School District Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas The Family Conservancy Project EAGLE	Greater Kansas City Food Policy Coalition Kansas City Community Gardens Society of St. Andrews, West Rosedale Healthy Kids Initiative Organization for Community Preservation Oak Grove Neighborhood Association Jefferson's Farms Episcopal Community Services Strugglers Hill-Roots Strong Avenue Studios

Healthy Communities Wyandotte is a countywide initiative to involve local leaders and citizens in improving the health of people in our community.

While many factors affect our health, the place that we call home may be the most important.

Healthy Communities Wyandotte got its start in 2009 when Mayor Joe Reardon and Joe Connor, director of the Unified Government's Public Health Department, gathered a group of community leaders and researchers to discuss health data that ranked Wyandotte County last in the state for overall health.

Since November 2010, community leaders and residents have been working together to tackle the health concerns of people who live, work, play, learn and operate businesses in Wyandotte County. Committee members from government, health care, education, community development, faith-based programs and nonprofit organizations form the backbone of the initiative.

More recently, residents, experts and community leaders on five Action Teams – communications, education, environmental infrastructure, nutrition, and health services – have united to brainstorm ideas for local improvements in each area. Their recommendations in this booklet are meant to provide a guide for how Wyandotte County residents can address issues that affect their well-being.

Communications Action Team

1. Create a healthier community by sharing information and stimulating discussion to change behavior.
2. Position HCW as the ultimate resource for advancing health among all community members.
3. Ensure continuity of effort through coordination among all HCW work groups.

Environmental Infrastructure Action Team

Build, redesign, and better utilize Wyandotte County's environmental infrastructure to provide opportunities for healthy and active living.

1. Provide physical activity opportunities throughout the county.
2. Improve neighborhood safety through infrastructure developments.
3. Create stronger neighborhoods through infrastructure developments that promote social connectedness.
4. Pursue policy changes that ensure improvements to environmental infrastructure.
5. Launch an educational campaign to inform the public about infrastructure improvements and strategies to lead an active life.

Education Action Team

Every student and family will have access to quality education and support services that promote readiness for school, future education, and subsequent careers.

1. Establish roles, responsibilities, and expectations to promote quality education and high achievement.
2. Integrate health and well-being into education.
3. Construct a comprehensive system to support quality education and high achievement.
4. Recognize and reward quality education and high achievement.
5. Create pathways to careers and post-secondary education.

Nutrition Action Team

Improve Wyandotte County's food environment so that all residents can and want to eat healthy food.

1. Promote healthy eating through school food policies and programs.
2. Launch a culturally-sensitive healthy lifestyle campaign that focuses on good nutrition.
3. Increase physical access to healthy foods.
4. Make nutritious food more affordable.
5. Launch an education, marketing, and policy campaign to counter the influence of unhealthy food.

Health Services Action Team

Increase access to quality, affordable mental and oral health services in Wyandotte County.

1. Increase oral and mental health awareness and education.
2. Improve access to mental and oral health by increasing and enhancing advocacy and policy efforts.
3. Increase the county's oral health workforce.
4. Create a system of oversight and evaluation to ensure cultural competence within and equitable access to health services.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

People who live and work in Wyandotte County face four main barriers to getting information that could improve their health:

1. Wyandotte County's media landscape is fragmented and offers organized, streamlined way for residents or professionals to access reliable information.
2. Many institutions that were accustomed to receiving regular news coverage in Wyandotte County – including organizations that impact the county's health – no longer get that coverage.
3. Shrinking overall news coverage makes it difficult for the county's residents to stay informed about health-related issues and events. It also limits the ability of organizations to spread health improvement information.
4. Due to differences in language, knowledge, culture and education level, effective communication requires addressing the needs of each audience and communicating information in multiple ways.

A successful communications plan can have a tremendous impact on the county's overall health. Information about medical care and health providers, for example, may help people receive health care and necessary medical services. Communicating information about risky behaviors and healthy living opportunities may also help people change their behaviors. In addition, announcements about community events, job openings, and educational support services may lead to improvements in socioeconomic factors. Lastly, effective communication about nearby food outlets and recreation facilities may change the way people interact with the physical environment and, in the long-term, perhaps change the environment itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create a healthier Wyandotte County by sharing information and stimulating discussion to change behavior.
 - Increase awareness in Wyandotte County about what it means to live in a healthy community.
 - Create and distribute promotional materials to distribute health promotion messages tailored to each of the county's various "audiences" (e.g., magnets, billboards, brochures, newsletters)
 - Increase individual actions that encourage healthy lifestyles.
 - Identify and engage key community influencers (e.g., ministers, celebrities, notable leaders) to deliver messages about healthy lifestyles and HCW community events (e.g., 5K run/walk, exercise competitions)
 - Create a recognition and reward system for outstanding personal action toward health
- Position Healthy Communities Wyandotte as the ultimate resource for advancing healthy living among all community members.
 - Increase awareness of HCW as a central resource for community health.
 - Drawing on information from HCW stakeholders, create a database to house information on programs, policies, research, and data that influence health in Wyandotte County (e.g., searchable web-based information clearinghouse)
 - Increase community engagement in HCW.
 - Establish and publicize regular opportunities for public discourse and feedback that feature a "key influencer" (e.g., the mayor, police chief, superintendents)
- Ensure continuity of effort through coordination among all HCW work groups.
 - Create policies and procedures for the Communications Action Team to support the work of Healthy Communities Wyandotte.
 - Create a marketing/communications office, staffed with two paid employees and interns.

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Environmental Infrastructure Action Team

Recommendations for a Better Future

GOAL:

Build, redesign, and better utilize Wyandotte County's environmental infrastructure to provide opportunities for healthy and active living.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Wyandotte County's outlook for health is concerning. Health outcomes help us understand how healthy we are right now, and health factors measure how healthy our community will be in the future and those elements we can influence to improve health. The Healthy Environmental Infrastructure Action Team will address the following health outcomes and factors in Wyandotte County:

- Poor and fair health (19%)
- Poor physical health days (3.7 per 30)
- Child and adult obesity (12% and 36%)
- Inadequate social support (27%)
- Homicide rate (22 per 100,000)
- Access to recreational facilities (6 per 100,000)
- Physical inactivity (31%)
- Diabetes (11%)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide physical activity opportunities throughout Wyandotte County.
 - Build, redesign and better utilize sidewalks, bike lanes, multi-use trails, and existing public facilities (e.g., parks, school grounds and community centers) while continuing to plan for future needs.
 - Partner to develop programs for seniors, adults, and children in Wyandotte.
 - Promote policy and program changes to improve access to natural areas in Wyandotte.
- Improve neighborhood safety through infrastructure developments.
 - Ensure that all neighborhoods have adequate lighting and trash receptacles.
 - Institute safety changes on high-pedestrian traffic thoroughfare streets (e.g., traffic-calming measures, wider sidewalks and high-profile crosswalks).
 - Increase the safety of bus stops (school and transit).
- Create stronger neighborhoods through infrastructure developments that promote social connectedness.
 - Ensure that all trails, sidewalks, and multi-use trails connect within the county and to surrounding counties.
 - Prioritize and encourage the development of neighborhoods that have an educational, commercial or public destination within ½ mile of residential areas.
- Pursue policy changes in Wyandotte that ensure improvements to environmental infrastructure.
 - Collaborate to support and strengthen community-based Parks and Recreation boards.
 - Encourage partnerships between public entities and private businesses to promote the creation and improvement of community centers.
- Launch an education campaign to inform the public about infrastructure improvements and strategies to lead an active life.
 - Promote the use of public facilities in Wyandotte County.

GOAL:

Every student and family will have access to quality education and support services that promote readiness for school, future education, and subsequent careers.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, “there is a well-known, large, and persistent association between education and health. This has been observed in many countries and time periods, and for a wide variety of health measures. The differences between the more than the less educated are significant: in 1999, the age-adjusted mortality rate of high school dropouts ages 25 to 64 was more than twice as large as the mortality rate of those with some college.” Furthermore, research suggests that “one more year of education decreases the probability of dying within 10 years by at least 3.6 percentage points.”

The 2011 *County Health Rankings* indicate that only 60% of students in Wyandotte County graduate from high school on time and only 42% of adults in the county have some post-secondary education. These low rates of educational attainment put Wyandotte County residents at greater risk for poor health outcomes and premature death.

Education also impacts many other health factors, in addition to death and illness, such as Wyandotte County’s unemployment rate, the proportion of children who live in poverty, and the amount of violent crime. On top of these socioeconomic factors, people with more education also tend to have healthier behaviors – they drink less, smoke less, use fewer illegal drugs, exercise more, and eat healthier. People with better education are also more likely to receive preventive care and diabetes or hypertension treatment. Overall, a better education helps everyone live a healthier, longer life.

ASSUMPTIONS:

1. Recommendations listed in this document pertain to the whole of Wyandotte County and concern “p-12+” education – that is, education that starts prenatally and continues throughout the life course.
2. It will be crucial for all residents, professionals, and organizations in Wyandotte County to work together to accomplish these collective goals. Therefore, partnership should be seen as an integral piece of every recommendation, strategy, priority, and example.
3. Educators, community members, community organizations, parents and students all play crucial roles in each piece of these recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish roles, responsibilities, and expectations to promote quality education and high achievement.
 - Identify and define, create buy-in to, and create a system of accountability for collective educational roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
 - Help everyone in Wyandotte County understand how they influence education and achievement.
- Integrate health and well-being into education.
 - Promote and integrate health literacy into educational curriculum across content areas.
 - Partner with community programs (e.g., Parents as Teachers, Early Head Start) to communicate the importance of early childhood development and school readiness.

- Create a framework system for assessing health at learning centers (e.g., health report cards).
- **Construct a comprehensive system to support quality education and high achievement.**
 - Identify a comprehensive system of family support services (e.g., parenting classes, after-school programs).
 - Explore the use of virtual classrooms and distance learning opportunities via Google Fiber.
 - Provide professional development opportunities to community members related to education and other social determinants of health.
- **Recognize and reward quality education and high achievement.**
 - Establish a coordinated, countywide system for monitoring, evaluating, and publicizing educational outcomes and achievement.
 - As an example, create a Mayor's Scholars Program to honor students who maintain a certain grade point average or complete a certain set of classes.
 - Create an incentive system that rewards high school graduates with assistance to pursue post-secondary education.
 - Examples include the Kauffman Scholars Program and the Dotte Promise.
 - Partner with local businesses to publicize the link between high achievement and job attainment.
 - Help students understand the benefits of working hard in school and how it can pay off through high-paying, fulfilling, local job opportunities.
- **Create pathways to careers and post-secondary education.**
 - Ensure that students have the knowledge and skills to pursue higher education or vocational aspirations that result in jobs.
 - Partner local businesses, schools, and institutions of higher learning to align curricula, key competencies, and skills.
 - Introduce potential career paths as early as middle school by featuring role models who can motivate and help make coursework feel relevant.
 - Create mentorship or apprenticeship programs between local business and hard-working students.
 - Examples include Gear Up and Youth Build.

GOAL:

Improve Wyandotte County's food environment so that all residents can and want to eat healthy food.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 18,062 people living in 13 census tracts in Wyandotte County have low access to food. In urban tracts, the USDA defines "low access" if at least 1/3 of the tract's residents reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store. These low access communities are also referred to as "food deserts."

Physical distance, however, is only one barrier to eating healthy food in Wyandotte County. Other impediments include the high price of healthy food, social practices that limit healthy food intake, cultural norms that do not incorporate foods typically grown in Kansas, and a shortage of perceived or actual time that encourages the consumption of unhealthy foods. Additionally, not everyone in Wyandotte County understands how to prepare healthy food from scratch, possesses the knowledge to make informed decisions about nutrition, or feels capable of leading a healthy lifestyle. Lack of nutritional knowledge and empowerment contributes, in turn, to a low countywide motivation to eat fresh fruits and vegetables. Finally, incentives to eating unhealthy food also abound, making it difficult for residents to prioritize nutritious food over fast food. These incentives include the fast-food marketing that drives corporate profit, low prices, an abundance of unhealthy food vendors, and community influences that associate social esteem with an unhealthy diet.

ASSUMPTIONS:

1. There is a need to improve nutrition among Wyandotte County residents. Creating or amending policies and programs that improve the food environment may facilitate more nutritious eating habits and lead to better health among community members.
2. Partnerships among county leaders, organizations, institutions, and residents will be crucial if we hope to improve nutrition in Wyandotte County. It's important that the community join together and assist one another in making Wyandotte County a better place to live.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Promote healthy eating through school food policies and programs.
 - Institute farm-to-school programs to supply all school food programs with fresh produce.
 - Create programs that foster partnerships among local producers and schools to establish convenient, affordable food channels.
 - Encourage all schools to create school gardens so that students learn how to grow healthy food and why it's important to eat healthy food.
 - Develop district policies and partnerships to promote school gardens by mitigating legal liability and maintenance concerns.
 - Allow students to accrue service hours through gardening activities.
 - Train educators to model healthy behaviors in and around school grounds.
 - Provide resources and incentives to encourage educators to use alternatives to candy and food-based achievement incentives in the classroom.

- **Launch culturally sensitive healthy lifestyle campaigns that focus on good nutrition.**
 - Encourage healthier food at community events.
 - Encourage the Unified Government to adopt policies that promote the purchase of healthy, local food for public events and that require caterers at such events to provide healthy food.
 - Offer incentives (e.g., recognition or endorsement) for restaurants that promote healthier, more affordable, local options (e.g., by increasing the prevalence of healthy food on their menus, serving age-appropriate portion sizes, or making the default standard option healthy – apples instead of fries, milk instead of soda).
 - Establish standards that outlets must meet or exceed in order to qualify for free HCW promotion.
 - Make healthy menu choices easily identifiable.
 - Use stickers and promotions to highlight nutritious options.
 - Publicize new USDA guidelines and other nutrition resources that provide examples of healthy food choices.
- **Increase physical access to healthy foods in Wyandotte.**
 - Amend zoning codes and inspection regulations to make it easier for residents and producers to grow and distribute healthy food where they live.
 - Establish and support organizations that help residents assess and remediate their soil.
 - Increase the ease of leasing or purchasing property from the UG Land Bank, especially in high-poverty areas.
 - Encourage more vendors to produce and sell fruits and vegetables in underserved neighborhoods.
 - Partner with faith-based and other community organizations to increase food distribution channels (e.g., mobile healthy food carts, produce trucks, farm stands).
 - Create incentive programs to attract supermarkets and grocery stores to underserved neighborhoods (e.g., tax credits, grant and loan programs, small business/economic development programs).
 - Revise transportation policies and programs among the UG and local businesses to make accessing healthy foods within Wyandotte easier.
 - Create remote supermarkets whereby residents can call in or electronically submit grocery orders and pick them up without delivery charges at nearby public facilities.
- **Make nutritious food more affordable.**
 - Support and promote the expansion of community garden programs that encourage the cultivation of healthy foods among residents.
 - Encourage residents to garden in their own yards and provide start-up funding for growing materials (e.g., seeds, shovels).
 - Partner with the Greater KC Food Policy Coalition to advocate for policy changes that promote the expansion of urban growing (e.g., zoning, public land use regulations, land disposition, water permits and prices, special use permits, and code enforcement).
 - Expand nutrition assistance programs to help all residents purchase affordable foods.
 - Fund outreach, education, and transportation to help qualifying low-income residents enroll in nutrition assistance programs and use their benefits at farmers' markets and farm stands.
 - Partner with the Public Health Department and local health care providers to encourage prescriptions for healthy food along with supplying farmers' market vouchers.
- **Launch an education, marketing and policy campaign to counter the influence of unhealthy food.**
 - Discourage the UG from using restaurants that serve high-calorie, nutrient-poor food as economic development tools, but rather, encourage the UG to invest in local food systems that provide healthy food options to community members.
 - Create a UG Food System Commission that incorporates representation from elected officials and residents, and that employs a food policy director (within the UG) who oversees and spearheads food policy activities.
 - Amend zoning policies related to the advertisement of unhealthy foods and development of unhealthy restaurants near venues frequented by children and families (e.g., playgrounds, schools, places of worship).

GOAL:

Increase access to quality and affordable mental and oral health services in Wyandotte County.

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Among adults living in Wyandotte County in 2010, 28.3 percent reported not having visited a dentist in the past year and 27.2 percent reported not having had their teeth cleaned in over a year. This type of inadequate oral health care in the county may contribute to the 40.9 percent of adults who also reported, in 2010, that one or more of their permanent teeth had been removed due to tooth decay or gum disease.

Oral health isn't Wyandotte's only area of improvement in the area of health services, though. Data from the 2011 *County Health Rankings* and feedback from residents in 2010 also indicate that the county has room for improvement in the areas of mental health and cultural competency. Data from the *Rankings* show that the number of adults who report having "poor mental health days" per month is almost one-third higher than the state rate (3.2 every 30 days). Residents also told us, during community listening sessions in June 2010, that mental health and mental illness carries a sizeable stigma in Wyandotte County and that people refrain from seeking services due to this negative perception.

Lastly, many residents expressed concern about their treatment when seeking health services in Wyandotte County. They spoke of being belittled, harassed, and patronized by clinicians and administrative staff, and of language barriers that made it difficult to understand the medical recommendations provided to them. Addressing each of these issues – oral health, mental health, and cultural competency – will be crucial if we hope to improve the health of our community.

ASSUMPTIONS:

1. One way to improve health outcomes is to increase access to quality, affordable care.
2. Strategic collection of data should inform strategies and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase oral and mental health awareness and education.
 - Evaluate and enhance education and outreach efforts to provide residents with information about mental and oral health prevention, providers, and accessing services.
 - Create a clearinghouse of oral and mental health information (e.g., furnish information on available providers, types of insurance accepted, specialists).
 - Identify and eliminate barriers to accessing mental or oral health services.
 - Promote oral and mental health prevention and treatment through a public education campaign.
 - Strategically target and engage community organizations (e.g., schools, child care providers, assisted living facilities) to join a campaign to promote good oral and mental health.
 - Partner with school districts and the health department to develop screening cards to begin detecting and addressing oral and mental health needs outside of school.
- Improve access to mental and oral health care by increasing and enhancing advocacy and policy efforts.
 - Advocate for dental and mental health homes for all residents as a way of ensuring timely, adequate, and quality prevention and treatment.

- Partner with local entities to pilot a local reimbursement or incentive system for providers who care for patients with public insurance.
 - Encourage the Unified Government to partner with local foundations to create supplementary Medicaid reimbursement programs.
 - Use tax incentives to encourage providers to accept a certain number of Medicaid beneficiaries per day.
- Advocate for higher Medicaid reimbursement rates at the state level.
- Increase the county's oral health workforce.
 - Focus on recruiting more dentists through the state and county.
 - Partner with statewide organizations and coalitions to support advocacy efforts to increase workforce development.
 - Provide financial incentives and resources (e.g., scholarships, loan forgiveness programs) that encourage the expansion of the oral health workforce.
 - Ensure adequate resources for publicly funded oral health education and training programs to meet current and future labor demands for oral health providers.
 - Promote and support recruitment or apprenticeship programs starting in high school.
- Create a system of oversight and evaluation to ensure cultural competence within and equitable access to health services.
 - Encourage health care organizations to ensure that patients receive effective, understandable, and respectful care that is provided in a manner compatible with their cultural health beliefs, practices, and preferred language from all staff members.
 - Encourage health care organizations to implement strategies to recruit, retain, and promote diverse staff members and leaders that are representative of the service area's demographic characteristics.
 - Mandate that health care organizations must offer and provide language assistance services, including bilingual staff and interpreters, at no cost to each patient with limited English proficiency at all points of contact, in a timely manner during all hours of operation.
 - Require health care organizations to provide patients, in their preferred language, both verbal offers and written notices informing them of their right to receive language assistance services.