

CREATING VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Sun Health Virtual Community Town Hall

July 30, 2020 – Online via Zoom

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Vibrant, healthy communities are the product of various elements that work together synergistically to promote individual and community health. There is significant economic opportunity in the Maricopa County region, as compared with other parts of the state. Development in the West Valley has been rapid, strong, and largely focused on economic development. As development continues it will be important to discuss the healthy communities wheel to be sure all the elements of community health are considered.

Economic prosperity is not as robust and universal as it might be. There are many pathways to education and workforce training, but there are also some challenges. For example, some children lack computer technology and broadband access that is needed to utilize educational resources. Simply being employed, if one must work two or three jobs to live, is not economic prosperity. For a community to be economically healthy working people should be able to earn a living wage.

Among the strengths of West Valley communities are the existence of programs such as food banks, meal delivery programs, and utility assistance. West-side communities are diverse, safe, and calm places where people can sit and talk with each other with relatively high degree of social cohesion. There is abundant, quality health care. There are many retirement communities with lots of ways to engage—fitness centers, rec centers, golf.

There are wonderful resources available in the West Valley, but there is room for improvement.

While there are many ways for people to connect, there are pockets of loneliness and isolation, and COVID-19 has made that worse. We need to find ways to connect with people who are not part of organized communities. There are a variety of health care resources available, but some people have difficulty accessing them or even finding them. There is a need for care coordination. Educational programs and services are not universally available and accessible, and more focus is needed on the issue of equity. West-side communities should become more engaged in joint planning and coordination to optimize their investments in the elements that support healthy communities.

CURRENT EVENTS AND VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

COVID-19, and the significant disparity in death rates, have highlighted the disparate conditions prevalent in our society that affect health and wellbeing. Those who are most vulnerable have been impacted the hardest. The elements of health depicted on the wheel represent underlying conditions that contribute to chronic disease, and vulnerability to COVID-19.

The most vulnerable are highest at risk of not having, or losing, food, shelter, clothing, and health care. They are least likely to be employed securely, most likely to become unemployed in a downturn, and least likely to be reemployed. They are most likely to suffer from chronic disease, and least likely to be educated about chronic conditions or to receive preventative care for those conditions. This is reflected in disparate death rates from COVID-19—8 per 100,000 in Maricopa County, 15 per 100,000 in Navajo Nation, 20 per 100,000 in Yuma County.

At the societal level, COVID-19 has damaged the social fabric. There is less social cohesion, and a greater sense of isolation. Although access to care is enhanced in some ways, such as through greater availability of telehealth, in others it has been diminished. It is projected that 30-50% of the nonprofits that provide services to the most vulnerable will go out of business in the next 6 months.

Sun Health, and other health care providers, are also directly affected by these conditions. Sun Health has a global work force that is affected by the conditions that create these disparities and the need to treat people coming from regions where health care is not generally available. The U.S. spends two-and-a-half times what other developed nations spend, but we have outcomes at bottom of pack. We need to look at where the money is going, spend more on social determinants of health and education, and spend less on administration and treatment. We need to prioritize educational programs that help people understand and deal with chronic underlying conditions.

TAKING ACTION

1. Make sure that members and residents are informed about health care programs and what Sun Health is doing to contribute to community health.
2. Based on the West Valley community needs assessments performed earlier this year – collaborate with community leaders and organizations on three key topics: chronic disease, access to care (1-800-I need help) and Alzheimer's.
3. Create a directory of like-minded organizations to facilitate communication and collaboration.
4. Create/enhance the pipeline of post-secondary educational opportunities to assure that there is a trained and educated workforce. Organizations like Sun Health can partner with educational institutions to provide opportunities for internships and mentoring.
5. Provide scholarships for students who otherwise could not afford to attend college to become trained as health care workers.
6. Refine the general ideas developed during this discussion into two or three specific proposals that can be presented to prospective partners for consideration and action.
7. Look ahead to evaluate and plan for a possible senior affordable housing crisis.