



Community Health Needs Assessment 2010

July 2010

Athens-Clarke County, GA



Executive Summary

The process of developing this Community Health Needs Assessment has been both an affirming and confirming experience for St. Mary's Health Care System. It has affirmed for the health care system the many opportunities and partnerships that exist in Athens-Clarke County and its surrounding counties for improving the lives of our community members. Some of these partnerships have been informal and long standing with agencies such as the free clinics. St. Mary's employees and physicians have volunteered their time on a consistent basis for example, to Mercy Health Center. This continues to be an example of service by St. Mary's in the community. Some partnerships are more recent and newly formed such as the partnership with Athens Health Network and Habitat for Humanity.

The many community members and representatives of agencies that we spoke with affirmed for us our community's dedication to service. Over and over, community leaders, especially in healthcare agencies, spoke of the needs coupled with willingness to serve. One of our richest assets in this community is the dedicated and involved residents regardless of their socioeconomic or educational level.

One of the biggest hurdles that faces Athens-Clarke County is coordination and cooperation among services and agencies. This coordination needs to be addressed and developed in order to be successful in providing better health care for all members of the community. Silos are useful places to keep the resources, but when one silo is empty, how does it connect with the next one to keep the resources flowing?

St. Mary's has been able to identify priorities and plan initial strategies for developing further participation in the community. These priorities and strategies involved listening to the needs voiced by the community, the analysis of the data collected, the experiences of our health care system, and the setting of priorities within the scope of St. Mary's resources. We considered both our financial and personnel resources in the decision making process.

We again thank the community members and the staff of St. Mary's who helped in completing this assessment. In particular, our thanks goes to Katie Weiser, student intern, from the University of Georgia, School of Public Health whose assistance was invaluable in completing this assessment.

Sister Patricia Loome
Vice President, Mission Services
St. Mary's Health Care System
Athens, Georgia



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Introduction

The Community Health Needs Assessment that has been undertaken by St. Mary's Health Care System was designed to help the health system become aware of the current needs and existing assets within the community we serve. Concurrently, we wanted to learn how to best respond to these needs within the scope of our services and partnerships. Although St. Mary's Health Care System receives patients from several surrounding counties, our needs assessment is focused on Athens-Clarke County where the hospital is physically located. Athens-Clarke County is also the geographic center of the other counties served as well as the most densely populated of these counties.

As a member of Catholic Health East, St. Mary's Health Care System is committed to being a transforming, healing presence within our community. Completing a needs assessment will play a vital role in determining how and where St. Mary's Health Care System can continue to best serve the community. This assessment will help to confirm the value of the services now offered and help to forge new partnerships within the community. All of this will ensure that our community outreach is effective and supported by the community.

Finally, the needs assessment has also been undertaken as part of our federal responsibility as a not-for-profit hospital. Under the recently passed federal health reform bill, all not-for-profit hospitals are required to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment every three years. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 describes a Community Health Needs Assessment as an assessment that, "takes into account input from persons who represent the broad interests of the community served by the hospital facility, including those with special knowledge of or expertise in public health," and "is made widely available to the public." We feel that this assessment had fulfilled this requirement.

Infrastructure and Members of Committees

The community health needs assessment was lead and conducted by:

Sister Patricia Loome, Vice President of Mission Services

With the assistance of:

Ms. Katie Weiser, MPH intern, University of Georgia, College of Public Health

Community Member Contributions

Ms. Tracy Thompson, Mercy Health Center, Director

Dr. Diane Dunston, MD, Athens Neighborhood Health Center, Director

Ms. Delene Porter, Athens Area Community Foundation, Director

Ms. Erin Sullivan, Athens Nurses Clinic, Director

Dr. Barbara Schuster, MD, Georgia Health Sciences University /University of Georgia Medical Partnership, Dean

Ms. Julie Meehan, Community Connection, Director

Dr. Paul Boumbulian, PhD, OneAthens Health Network, Public Service Associate

Mr. Evan Mills, Homeless Coalition of Northeast Georgia, Athens-Clarke County Human and Economic Development, Community Development Specialist

Ms. Marcia Massengill, Clarke County Health Department, Nurse Manager

Rev. Tim Mattox, Pastor, Athens-Clarke County

Sr. Margarita Martin, Oasis Católico, Athens-Clarke County

Spencer Frye, Habitat for Humanity, Executive Director, Athens

Community Advisory Council and Internal Planning Team

Dr. Paul Boumbulian, PhD, One Athens Health Network, Public Service Associate

Ms. Tracy Thompson, Mercy Health Center, Director

Dr. Robert Hooker, Ed.D, Clarke Central High School, Principal

Sr. Patricia Loome, Vice President of Mission Services, St. Mary's Health Care System

Ms. Stephanie Walsh, Grant Specialist, St. Mary's Foundation

Ms. Katie Weiser, MPH intern, University of Georgia, College of Public Health

St. Mary's Health Care System Leadership Priority Committee

Don McKenna, President & Chief Executive Officer

Sr. Patricia Loome, Vice President, Mission Services

Nina Evans, Vice President & Chief Nursing Officer

Karen Schuller, Vice President, General Counsel

Dr. Bruce Middendorf, Vice President, Medical Affairs & Chief Medical Officer

Marty Hutson, Vice President & Chief Financial Officer

Jeff English, Vice President, Human Resources

Kerry Vaughn, Chief Information Officer

Brenda Dugger, Vice President of Quality, Compliance & Continuing Care

St. Mary's Community Defined

St. Mary's Hospital is located in Athens-Clarke County and serves a multi-county area in Northeast Georgia. The hospital system receives patients from the surrounding counties of Barrow, Oconee, Jackson, Madison, Morgan, Walton, Greene, Elbert and Oglethorpe counties.

The community that St. Mary's serves is very diverse economically, culturally, and racially. Athens-Clarke County contains the city of Athens which is a medium sized city and the urban center to the surrounding rural counties. Athens-Clarke County is home to the University of Georgia, two major hospitals, and the main district health department. It has been named one of "America's Best College Towns" as well as one of the "Top Southern Retirement Hotspots."¹ This is another aspect of the diversity of the community. Athens is also known for having an abundance of non-profits and has been known to have a "volunteer spirit."



Despite the many accolades and abundant resources, Athens-Clarke County is one of the poorest counties in the state of Georgia. Many low socioeconomic groups face disparities and hardships because of their poverty. The University of Georgia is the largest employer in Athens-Clarke County, and because it is a public university and therefore tax-exempt, there is a large tax expenditure by the county.² It appears that this creates a financial disparity for Athens-Clarke County and may be contributing to our community's poverty rate.

Scope of Needs Assessment

Although St. Mary's Health Care System receives patients from several surrounding counties, our Community Health Needs Assessment focuses on Athens-Clarke County. While St. Mary's Hospital is situated within the bounds of Athens-Clarke County and the system has facilities in other counties, this county is the central point geographically. The majority of patients receiving care at St. Mary's hospital live in Athens-Clarke County and the population of the county is greater than that of any surrounding county. As well, many community health resources are located in Athens-Clarke County. Expansion into other counties continues to be a growth point

for the system.

The Community Health Needs Assessment targeted several different groups within Athens-Clarke County known to have unmet health needs. These groups included homeless persons, uninsured and underinsured persons. Many chronic conditions are known to be increasing throughout the nation; therefore, members of this community with such conditions were of central focus. Finally, racial and ethnic groups shown to have health disparities were also a focus of the assessment (e.g. Latinos and African Americans).



Methodology

Community Health Needs Assessment is a dynamic process that identifies health needs of the community by drawing on qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources and sectors within the community. This needs assessment was carried out in accordance with the Community Health Needs Assessment format of Catholic Health East. This format mirrors the standard format of needs assessment used by the Catholic Health Association.

The assessment began with the collection of secondary data from various resources. Secondary data included such data as demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as well as health status indicators. After the quantitative data was compiled, focused interviews were conducted with community members to collect primary data about our community. The community members interviewed are knowledgeable about the health of the community within Athens-Clarke County. Once data collection was complete, a meeting was held with several key community members to discuss our findings and obtain their assistance in setting priorities to respond to needs in the community. Finally, a leadership committee within St. Mary's Health Care System met to determine how St. Mary's can best participate in helping to meet the determined needs of our community.

Secondary Data

Quantitative data describing the demographics and socioeconomic characteristics was collected. Information about the health status of our community was also compiled, with an emphasis on data relating to chronic disease and access to health care. Data describing the homeless population of Athens was also included in our findings. Data was gathered from various sources including:

- Athens-Clarke County Government
- Georgia State Government
- Federal Government
- University of Georgia
- Others

Primary Data

In order to better understand our community and to supplement the quantitative data, we spoke with community members about the needs they believe are most pressing in our community. These community members have an expertise and/or invested interest in the health of our community. They all work or serve in Athens-Clarke County and most work closely with the people of Athens-Clarke County. All of our interviewees are stakeholders in the health of our community or in specific populations represented in Athens-Clarke County. The following community members were interviewed:

- Ms. Tracy Thompson, Mercy Health Center, Director
- Dr. Diane Dunston, MD, Athens Neighborhood Health Center, Director
- Ms. Delene Porter, Athens Area Community Foundation, Director
- Ms. Erin Sullivan, Athens Nurses Clinic, Director
- Dr. Barbara Schuster, MD, Georgia Health Sciences University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership, Dean
- Ms. Julie Meehan, Community Connection, Director
- Dr. Paul Boumbulian, PhD, OneAthens Health Network, Public Service Associate
- Mr. Evan Mills, Homeless Coalition of Northeast Georgia, Athens-Clarke County Human and Economic Development, Community Development Specialist
- Ms. Marcia Massengill, Clarke County Health Department, Nurse Manager
- Rev. Tim Mattox, Pastor, Athens-Clarke County
- Sr. Margarita Martin, Oasis Católico, Athens-Clarke County
- Spencer Frye, Athens Area Habitat for Humanity, Executive Director

Community Advisory Council

After collecting data and forming a complete profile of our community, a meeting was held with several key community members to focus the needs in our community based on our findings. The community members invited to this meeting represented unique and important segments of our community. We invited Tracy Thompson from Mercy Health Center which serves the uninsured population, Dr. Robbie Hooker from the public school system, Dr. Paul Boumbulian who at present leads the Athens Health Network, Dr. Paul Burnett, MD from the district health department, and Marcia Massengill also from the health department, and the current pastor of First AME Church in Athens. These community members were given an overview of our findings and were asked to discuss which needs they consider most important and why. From this meeting, we were able to identify several health needs that affect many community members and could be considered top priorities as St. Mary's moves forward in strategic community outreach.

Hospital Leadership Committee

With the findings from our data collection and prioritized needs, we held a meeting with the Senior Leadership of St. Mary's Health Care System. The purpose of this meeting was to determine which needs the hospital can financially and physically undertake. The leadership committee discussed and determined the best strategies for St. Mary's to address some of the most important needs in our community.

St. Mary's Board

St. Mary's System Board received a presentation on Community Benefits and the Community Health Needs Assessment. The Mission and Ministry Committee of the Board holds the responsibility for receiving and reviewing the Community Health Needs Assessment. They in turn will make the presentation to the full Board of the final report of the Community Health Needs Assessment for St. Mary's Health Care System for 2010. The Board has been kept informed and has given approval to the initial priority that the hospital will engage in before the end of 2010.

Mission and Ministry Committee

- Mr. Charles Upchurch, Chair and Vice-Chair of the System Board
- Mr. Lou Perno, Board member
- Mr. Thomas Hollingsworth, III, Board member
- Sr. Patricia Loome, Vice President, Mission Services
- Mr. Don McKenna, President & CEO, St. Mary's Health Care System
- Ms. Carol Cason, Secretary to the Board



Findings & Analysis

Primary and secondary data describing Athens-Clarke County is contained in this section. This data was collected from a wide array of resources and has been compiled in this section to give a comprehensive overview of the health status of Athens-Clarke County. Demographic information about Athens-Clarke County is presented first, followed by a socioeconomic profile of the county. There are also data and statistics describing the health status of the community. These sections include measures of mortality and morbidity as well as information on health behaviors and several chronic diseases.

Data about the homeless population is presented next with a section on health care costs associated with the homeless population. Next, a list and brief description of current health related resources in our community is included. Lastly, a summary of our findings from focused interviews with community leaders is presented.

Demographic Data

The estimated population of Athens-Clarke County in 2008 was 114,737 people. The population is increasing, and from 2000 to 2008, the population grew by 13.1%.³

The 2008 estimated median age was 26.8 years, almost 10 years younger than the Georgia county average.³ This is due largely to the presence of the University of Georgia which currently enrolls more than 34,000 undergraduate and graduate students in total.⁴

Athens-Clarke County is a very diverse community in many aspects.

- Race/Ethnicity (2008)³
 - White: 69.7%
 - Black: 25.3%
 - Hispanic/Latino: 9.2%
- Educational Attainment—age 25+ (2000)³
 - Not completing high school: 19.0%
 - High school graduate: 21.6%
 - Some college and/or associates degree: 19.6%
 - Bachelor's degree: 20.9%
 - Graduate or professional degree: 18.9%
- Households (2000)³
 - Married couples: 65.8%
 - Female householder, no husband present: 26.9%
 - Female householder, no husband, w/ children under 18 yrs: 15.9%
- Age Distribution⁵
 - Under age 19: 25.2%
 - Age 19 to 64: 66.3%
 - Age 65 and over: 8.6%

In the Clarke County Public School System, the completion rate for the class of 2008 was 63.1%. This percentage is lower than both the Georgia aggregate and the county average. This may be related to several factors including:³

- High school dropout rate (per 100 enrolled): 7.9
- Economically disadvantaged: 70.8%
- Students retained in a grade: 7.6%
- Students with disabilities: 15%

Clarke County School District⁶

- Enrollment: 12,431
- Grades: Pre-K-12
- Gifted Education Enrollment: 1,552
- Students in Advanced Placement Classes: 461
- Native Languages Spoken: 34

Socioeconomic Characteristics

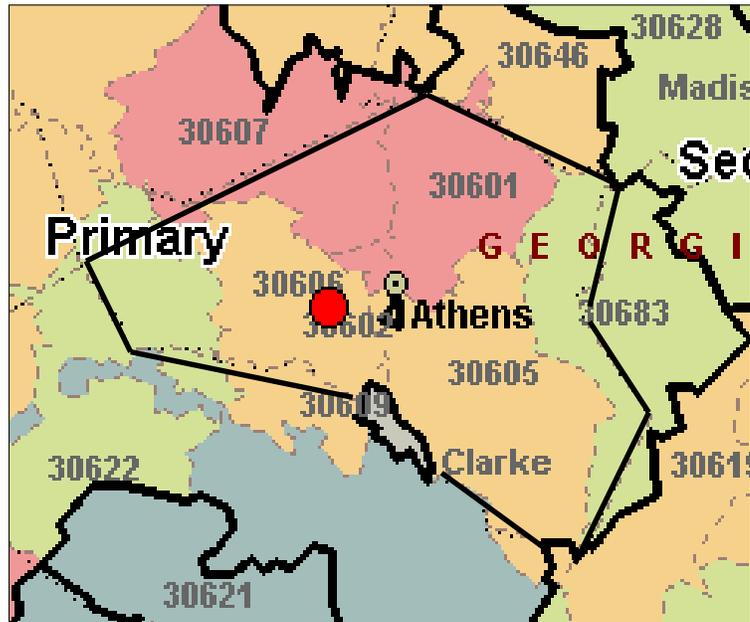
A significant percent of the Athens population lives in poverty. In 2008, it was estimated that 30.8% or 32,560 individuals in Athens-Clarke County live in poverty, and 26.2% of all children live in poverty.³ These percentages are much higher than the Georgia state estimates of 14.7% of all individuals and 20.2% of children in poverty.³

Athens-Clarke County can be broken down into six small areas by zip code. The table below shows the community need score for each zip code area of Athens-Clarke County and some of the indicators that are used to determine the community need score. Community need scores are based on a scale of 1 to 5. A community need score of 5 indicates the highest need while a score of 1 represents the lowest need.⁷

Zip Code	Community Need Score	Poverty Age 65+	Single Female w/ Children	No High School Diploma	Minority	Limited English	Unemployed	Uninsured
30601	5	63%	49%	37%	68%	13%	11%	51%
30607	5	51%	44%	34%	55%	21%	7%	31%
30605	4	35%	51%	12%	27%	11%	13%	53%
30606	3.8	37%	45%	13%	33%	10%	5%	35%
30602	3.8	20%	33%	6%	32%	20%	47%	77%
30683	3.4	38%	27%	19%	21%	5%	4%	21%

As seen in the table above, two of the six zip code areas have a community need score of 5, indicating a very high need. The poverty rate for persons 65 and older varies from 20% to 65% in Athens-Clarke County. Single females with children make up almost half of most zip code area families, and uninsured rates range from 21% to 77%.⁷ These numbers reveal some of the educational, income, and health disparities faced by certain populations in Athens-Clarke County.

The median household income in 2008 was estimated at \$36,254, which is also much lower than the Georgia state median income of \$50,834.³ The average annual unemployment rate for Athens-Clarke County in 2008 was 5.0%³, but as the table above shows, unemployment is much higher in certain areas.

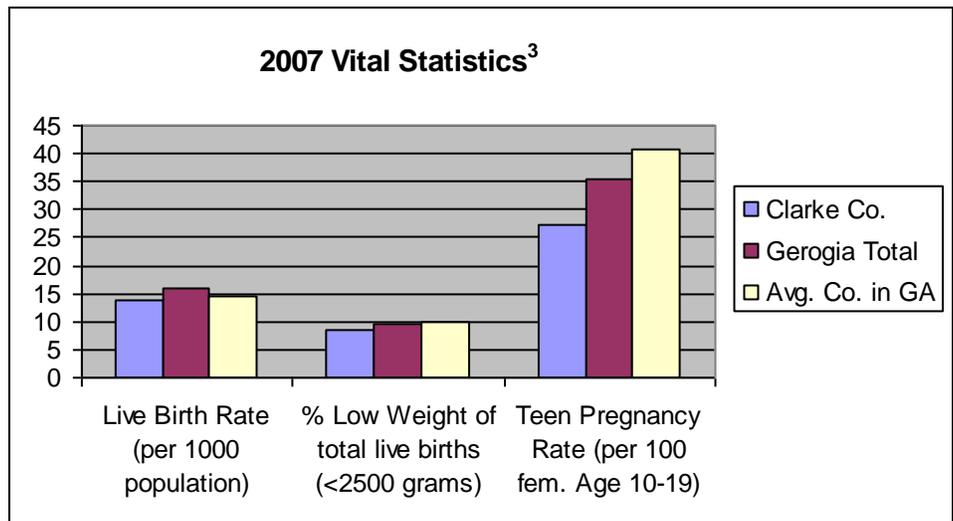


Health Data

The County Health Rankings report premature death as a measure of mortality. In 2010, the Clarke County rate of premature death is 7,275 per 100,000 population. Premature death represents the years of potential life lost before age 75 and the rate is age adjusted. The County Health Rankings also report several measures of morbidity. Average number of poor physical health days were reported as 2.8 per month and average number of poor mental health days were reported as 3.2 per month. The percent of live births in which the infant was considered low birth weight, or less than 2,500 grams, was 9.0% in 2010.⁸

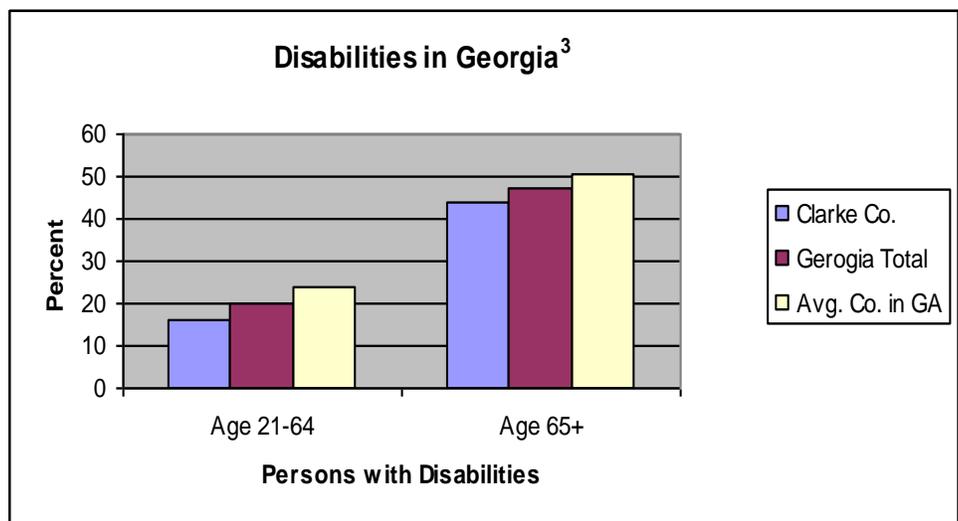
The following graphs give information about several vital statistics and health indicators. The vital statistics are measures from 2007. Another important vital statistic is the death rate. The Athens-Clarke County death rate was 532.2 per 100,000 population.³

Another indicator of population health is the STD rate. The Athens-Clarke County rate in 2008 was 945.6 per 100,000 population. The value is significantly higher than the Georgia total (633.4) and the average Georgia county (596.9).³



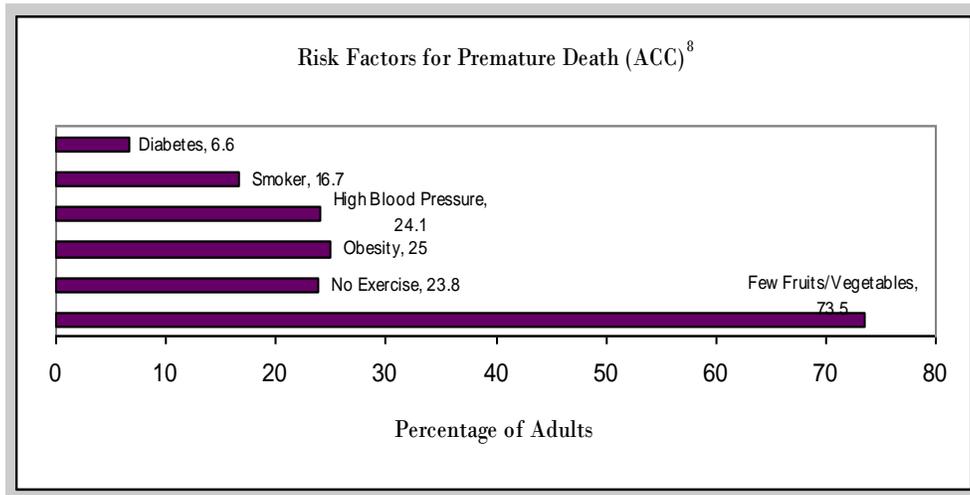
The second graph shows the percent of Athens-Clarke County residents with disabilities in 2000.

Another indicator of the health of Athens-Clarke County is the percent of the populations that is uninsured. In 2010, County Health Rankings reported that 32% of adults in Athens-Clarke County are uninsured.⁸ In relation to the uninsured population, 10,665 emergency room visits in 2007 in Athens-Clarke County were reported as self-pay.⁹



Furthermore, 18.1% of the population was receiving Medicaid and 10% were receiving food stamps as reported in 2008.³

Health behaviors play a major role in the health of a community. The rates of disease can also be indicators of community health and major health needs in the community. The following graph gives the proportion of adults in Athens-Clarke County in 2009 with the health condition listed or who practices the unhealthy behavior. The six factors listed below are considered risk factors for premature death and all can be treated or changed to improve a person’s health and increase their life expectancy.⁵



Obesity is a serious health condition in Athens-Clarke County as well as in the state and nation. Rates of obesity have been increasing steadily over the past 20 years. The Georgia Division of Public Health reported in 2009 that 28% of civilian adults in Georgia are obese and that obesity “has increased rapidly in all regions of the state.” In conjunction with the trends in obesity, they also report that only 48% of adults are regularly active, and only 25% of adults “consume 5 or more servings of fruits or vegetables daily.” Also, nationwide it has been shown that hospital stays for obese patients are 60% longer than for normal-weight patients.¹⁰

The Georgia Division of Public Health also reported specifically on childhood obesity in 2009, saying that, “Obesity in children and youth is a significant public health problem.”¹⁰

- 15% of children (2-4 years) enrolled in WIC (women, infant, children program) are obese
- 24% of third graders are obese
- 14% of middle school and high school students are obese

Obesity is associated with an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, hypertension, gall bladder disease, osteoarthritis, and some cancers.¹⁰

Diabetes is also a serious disease that is prevalent in Athens-Clarke County. In the state of Georgia in 2007, more than 10% of the population has been diagnosed with diabetes. The Georgia Division of Public Health further notes that, “For every two persons with diabetes who have been diagnosed, another has not yet been diagnosed.” In 2006, diabetes was the seventh leading cause of death in Georgia, and also a very costly chronic disease. Diabetes is preventable and complications can be minimized with proper early detection and proper management.¹¹

Homelessness

The 2010 annual point-in-time homeless count reported 496 homeless persons total in Athens-Clarke County.¹² This is a 9.25% increase from 2009 in which 454 homeless persons were reported.¹³ The 2010 homeless population can be characterized by the following:¹²

- 227 people unsheltered
- 44 families with children (totaling 143 people)
- 119 people chronically homeless
- 99 homeless youth (under 18 years)

Also reported in 2010 were shelter utilization rates. Nearly all shelters reported 100% utilization of beds. Two reported greater than 100% utilization and only three reported less than 100% utilization. Within the three shelters that were not at capacity, only eight beds total were available. With 227 homeless individuals living unsheltered and nearly 100% utilization of shelters, there is a large need for increased shelter space or housing assistance among the homeless population.¹⁴

“We have every service that a homeless person would need, but not enough of each service.”

— Evan Mills, ACC Human and Economic Development, Community Development Specialist

In 2005, Athens-Clarke County Department of Human and Economic Development put together a health care cost analysis in relation to the homeless population. In 2005 alone, there were 7,000 health care visits by homeless persons, including inpatient, outpatient and ER visits. The total health care cost attributable to this population in 2005 was \$12.378 million. The 7,000 visits included:¹⁵

- 611 inpatient visits (average cost of \$11,470)
- 1,692 outpatient visits (average cost of \$1,050)
- 4,687 emergency room visits (average cost of \$690)
- 700 ambulance rides (\$339,000 total)

Directly related to homelessness is the cost of housing and wage rates for Athens-Clarke County. The following table displays several figures that illustrate the current rates for renting homes. The first row is the Fair Market Rent (FMR) as determined by HUD. The second row gives the Living Hourly Wage (LHW) that would allow a person to spend no more than 30% of their income on rent. Finally, the third and fourth rows display the amount of hours a person would have to work each month (MH) or each week (WH) at minimum wage (MW), \$7.25, to pay rent for the month or week, respectively.¹⁶

Athens-Clarke	Efficiency	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	4 Bedroom
FMR	\$552.00	\$614.00	\$770.00	\$1,026.00	\$1,058.00
LHW	\$10.62	\$11.81	\$14.81	\$19.73	32.91
MH@MW	76.14	84.69	106.21	141.52	145.93
WH@MW	17.71	19.7	24.7	32.91	33.94

Available Community Health Resources

Hospitals:

St. Mary's Health Care System is a large, community, not for profit, faith-based hospital that has been serving Athens-Clarke County and surrounding counties for more than 100 years. It has been a Catholic health care system for over 70 years. St. Mary's is committed to being a compassionate healing presence in the community. The hospital system offers a wide variety of inpatient, outpatient, and home health care services. St. Mary's specializes in cardiology, neurosciences, orthopedics, women's health, children's health, hospice, and home health care. St. Mary's also operates a children's subspecialty outpatient clinic for children with chronic or serious illnesses. Specialists from around the state practice on a rotating basis so parents and children do not have to travel to Atlanta or Augusta for care.

Athens Regional Medical Center is a large health care system in Athens which serves Athens-Clarke County and surrounding counties. Athens Regional Medical Center includes a 360-bed acute care facility, four urgent care centers, a network of physicians, a health maintenance organization, and a home health agency. They are committed to excellence and dedicated to improving the health, wellness and quality of life of the community.

Public Health Services:

The *Clarke County Health Department* serves as the main health department of the Northeast Health District. They offer a wide variety of services to the public including screening and treatment of high blood pressure, diabetes, TB, and sexually transmitted diseases, immunizations, family planning services, environmental health services, and outbreak investigation.

The *Specialty Care Clinic* provides specialized outpatient primary care and referrals for adults with HIV/AIDS. They offer comprehensive HIV/AIDS services including HIV testing, counseling, patient education, primary care, infectious disease specialty care, financial assistance, nutritional assessments, and mental health and substance abuse services. Their goal is to empower HIV patients to make good decisions about their own care to promote health and well-being.

Teen Matters is a full service clinic offering care to teenagers from 11 to 19 years old. There are two Teen Matters clinics in Athens and they provide medical services, health education, guidance counseling, and community involvement opportunities.

East Athens/WIC Clinic provides women and children in low-income families with services that improve pregnancy outcomes, reduce infant mortality and give children a healthy start through nutritious food supplement and nutrition education. Services offered include nutrition counseling and education, breast-feeding support and education, a health resource library, and vouchers for food supplements.

Community Based Services:

Mercy Health Center is a faith-based, non-profit, free medical clinic serving the low income and uninsured of Athens. They provide free medical care, pharmaceuticals, and dental care. Currently, the medical clinic and pharmacy are open Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and Wednesday mornings. They provide dental care on Fridays from 9:00am to 2:00pm. Mercy's mission is to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual care for their low-income, uninsured

neighbors.

Athens Nurses Clinic is a non-profit clinic providing free health care to the uninsured population of Athens-Clarke County, especially the homeless. They currently have three nurse practitioners on staff and the clinic operates from 8:00am to 1:00pm four days a week. They are funded through donations and grants.

Athens Neighborhood Health Center is a private, non-profit health care provider currently staffed by two physicians. They serve a wide variety of patients in the Athens community with most services provided to the uninsured and underinsured. The Neighborhood Health Center charges patients on a sliding scale basis.

The *Athens Health Network* was established out of the OneAthens initiative to address poverty in Athens. The Network is forming a non-profit and is a partnership between St. Mary's Health Care System, Athens Regional Medical Center, the University of Georgia, the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government, as well as other health care providers and related organizations. The purpose of the Network is to improve health and reduce health care disparities of the uninsured and underinsured through the creation of a coordinated seamless, user-friendly safety net in order to assure each patient receives the care needed in an efficient and effective manner.

Mental Health Services:

Advantage Behavioral Health Systems is a publicly-funded provider of behavioral health, developmental disability and addictive disease services. Advantage Behavioral serves Athens-Clarke and surrounding counties. Mental health services include counseling, adult day programs, support groups, health education, and relapse prevention services. They also provide developmental disabilities services, community employment programs, residential services, child and adolescent services, and addictive disease services.

Nuci's Space is a non-profit health and music resource serving the Athens area. Their goal is to prevent suicide by providing "obstacle free" treatment to musicians who suffer from depression or other mental illnesses. They also work to educate and remove the stigma that mental illness often creates in the community.

Supply of Physicians and Health Personnel:

The University of Georgia reported 355 *practicing physicians* in Athens-Clarke County in 2006. This is more than twice the number of physicians on average in Georgia counties. The average is 116 physicians in a county.³ Also, the ratio of persons per physician 308:1. This number exceeds the overall state average (495:1) and the average Georgia county value (1,582:1).³

The *MCG/UGA Medical Partnership* is a newly opened medical school in Athens. They will have their first class of students this fall, beginning August 2010. This will result in an increase of medical students and physician staff who will be practicing in ACC.

Specialty Services:

AIDS Athens is a non-profit organization that works to address the needs of those affected by HIV/AIDS. Their client services include case management, housing, social support, health care, a food pantry, a clothing closet, educational workshops, financial planning, and employment programs. They also offer services to the community including HIV testing, an informational phone line, and events to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS.

Project Safe is an organization that offers comprehensive services to prevent domestic violence and serve victims of domestic violence. Their services encompass four areas of prevention and care including: education, crisis intervention, on-going support and systems change. Some services include counseling, support groups, emergency shelter, and transitional housing.

Hope Haven is private non-profit corporation that serves individuals with developmental disabilities living in Athens-Clarke County and surrounding areas. The programs they offer include day habilitation, day support, natural support, personal support, supported employment, and respite care.

Athens Pregnancy Center is a non-profit, faith-based organization that offers pregnancy related services to women experiencing unplanned pregnancy in the Athens community. They provide free pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, counseling, and educational classes regarding pregnancy and parenting.

Athens Community Council on Aging serves the aging population of Northeast Georgia. They offer a wide variety of services including adult day services, meal and transportation assistance, insurance counseling, and employment and volunteer programs. They also operate a senior center that offers social, cultural, educational, and health related programs. The Council on Aging is also an advocate for the residents of nursing homes and personal care homes.

Homeless Services:

The Athens Area Homeless Shelter provides comprehensive services to the homeless population of Northeast Georgia and fosters public awareness of homelessness. The services they provide include short and long term shelter for families, education and employment support services, and assistance with childcare.

The Stable Foundation is an organization that is dedicated to eradicating homelessness in Athens by providing housing to homeless families and individuals. The organization provides transitional housing according to the “Housing First” model in order to provide stability for this population.

The Bigger Vision of Athens is a non-profit organization that operates a community winter shelter for the homeless. Their mission is to provide a warm, dry place to sleep each night to temporarily homeless individuals.

Interfaith Hospitality Network is a non-profit organization that provides immediate shelter and guidance to homeless families in Athens. They offer their clients food, shelter, daycare and transportation in order to create stability and a future for the families they serve.

Palm House Recovery Centers is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to provide shelter and support to men and women recovering from alcohol or drug abuse. Their services include subsidized housing, AA meeting requirements, responsibility training, and random alcohol and drug testing.

The Northeast Georgia Homeless Coalition is an organization dedicated to serving the homeless by uniting all homeless service providers in Athens-Clarke County. The mission of the Homeless Coalition is to ensure collaborative planning, educational opportunities, technical assistance, resource development, and program advocacy for homeless service providers while assisting, both directly and indirectly, the homeless population in Athens-Clarke County as well as the surrounding 10 counties.

Findings from Community Input

Focused interviews with knowledgeable community members provided us with primary, qualitative data regarding the health needs of our community. The needs that were expressed by these community members are summarized in the following section.

The information we gathered from community members was very uniform throughout and also consistent with our quantitative data. The most common needs mentioned by community members were related to chronic diseases, access to clinics, and primary and specialty care for the uninsured or underinsured of our community.

Health Needs

Diabetes, hypertension, and obesity were all specific chronic health conditions that many of the community members noted as being a problem in our community. They said that many people with these conditions cannot get affordable treatment or prescriptions to manage their diseases, because they are uninsured or underinsured. Also, many community members see a need for increased education and preventive care in order to prevent people from developing these conditions in the first place. Prevention is very cost effective compared to the catastrophic treatment needed when a chronic disease is unmanaged and leads to major health problems. One community member reported that for diabetes, “one dollar spent on prevention saves four dollars on treatment in the future.” Education related to nutrition was recognized as especially important because of the link between obesity and so many other health conditions.

Almost all interviewees stated that a major need in the community is increased access to the free clinics, like Mercy Health Center and Athens Nurses Clinic, as well as the Athens Neighborhood Health Center which charges based on a sliding scale. These clinics are serving the populations most in need and who are not receiving care at other health care facilities in the community. However, the clinics are very full and under-staffed. It is very hard to get appointments and to be seen at these clinics. One community member said, “The clinics have great facilities, but cannot find doctors to fill the space.”

Another need related to the clinics that was mentioned by many community members was the need for increased communication and coordination between the clinics as well as other health care providers in the Athens area. Many people are going to many different providers and are not receiving the most effective treatment, because each provider is unaware of the other providers contact with that patient. If the clinics, the health department, and the hospitals were able to communicate more easily, they could provide more efficient treatment and patients would receive better quality care. The implementation of electronic medical records (EMR) will work towards improving this. The need for primary care providers who will see uninsured or underinsured patients goes hand in hand with the need for increased access to clinics. The clinics are the only place a person without insurance and/or with Medicaid can go to receive primary care.

The final need that was recognized by most community members was the need for specialty care for the uninsured and underinsured populations. The types of specialties mentioned most often were dental care, orthopedic care, and women’s health care. Most of the clinics are unable to provide specialty care, and therefore, the uninsured patients they treat do not have anywhere to get specialty care except the emergency rooms. Furthermore, emergency departments cannot offer follow up care, again highlighting the need for increased access to the clinics where

patients can establish a medical home.

Other health needs that community members see and experience in our community include a need for increased health literacy, decreased health disparities among socioeconomic and racial groups, increased mental health services, increased health insurance coverage, increased quality of care, and the presence of an infectious disease physician. The implementation of EMR in the clinics is recognized as a need especially as part of health care reform. Finally, the establishment of a federally qualified health center would greatly benefit our community by bringing in substantial financial support.

Populations in Need

Besides specific health needs, community members identified groups of people most in need of health care. The groups mentioned most often were those who are uninsured and underinsured.

Another group that often is a part of the uninsured and underinsured group is the working poor. This group consists of people who are working in low paying jobs that do not offer health insurance and are not making enough to be able to afford individual health insurance. Other groups that face difficulty in receiving health care are homeless people, Latinos, and undocumented workers. These groups of people often can be characterized as having a low socioeconomic status in the community. Some of the barriers include affordability, transportation, language barriers, access to care, and education.

Health Care Related Needs

Other needs more broadly related to health were also mentioned by many community members. Many of these needs can be considered indicators of community health as a whole. Social support or mentors for youth was mentioned by a few community members as being an important need that if addressed, could have a great impact on our community. Mentorship for students was mentioned as important to keep our community's youth in school. Education is a major determinant of health, and social support enables a person to get the care they need more easily than if they did not have any social support.

Increased coordination of social services was also mentioned by community members. We have many resources for people who seek these services, but like the clinics they are not communicating or coordinating well. Another concern was a need for increased temporary, financial assistance for housing, childcare, and health care costs for families or individuals in need.

In addition, there is a need for job creation as well as job retention. Employment and income are also strong determinants of health, and need to be addressed in order to increase community health.

Another concern related to health is the need to address social and behavioral problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, and domestic violence. Several interviewees mentioned the need to reform the public school system. Finally, it was said that there needs to be an increase in the expectation of measurable results when our limited resources are invested in health or community building.



Identified Needs

The findings from our data collection reveal several major needs in Athens-Clarke County. The socioeconomic data shows that a large proportion of the population lives in poverty or faces some other hardship such as unemployment, being a single parent with inadequate income, limited education, or part of a racial or ethnic minority.³ These circumstances frequently make it difficult to access quality health care.

One of the most prominent findings and most pressing needs in our community is a lack of access to basic primary care which was stated by our community interviewees. We found that access to health care may be influenced by several factors. One factor being a lack of health insurance. About 32% of the Athens-Clarke County population falls into this category.⁷ Another barrier to receiving health care is the limited capacity at the three clinics offering service to the uninsured and underinsured. The three community based clinics are great resources, but as heard from almost every community member interviewed, the clinics are very full and have difficulty accommodating new patients.

Chronic diseases, especially diabetes, were identified as major health problems facing our community. This was evident from the quantitative data as well as from the primary data given by community members. This problem might also be compounded by a lack of access to health care since chronic diseases usually require long term treatment and/or management. For this reason, many residents are often unable to receive the necessary treatment for chronic diseases.

Another chronic health condition that greatly affects the health of our community is obesity. More than one quarter of adults in Athens-Clarke County are obese.⁷ Obesity is a serious condition that increases a person's risk for many other diseases including diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. Obesity is affected by lifestyle as well as genetics. It is an epidemic not only in our county but all across the state and nation.¹⁰

Another need that was mentioned repeatedly by community members was the need for increased health education and preventative care. Most chronic diseases and health conditions like obesity and diabetes can be prevented. Not only do we need to treat those in our community who are currently suffering from chronic diseases, but we also need to prevent these conditions in the next generation. Prevention is very affordable and can target populations as opposed to individuals. More specifically, nutrition education was recognized as a major need in our community as nutrition is closely related to chronic conditions. Knowledge is power and when individuals are knowledgeable about health, they become empowered to promote their own wellness and take steps to prevent disease. Increased prevention and education will be the keys to addressing long term health needs in our community.

The final need that was very evident from our focused interviews was the need for increased coordination and cooperation between all sectors of the health care system in Athens-Clarke County. There are many health care and social service resources, but individuals are not always receiving the best or most effective care. At the present time, it is difficult for clinics, hospitals, and the health department to share information about patients that might be seeking care from multiple providers. Furthermore, health care providers may not be well connected or knowledgeable about social service providers in the community. Health is affected by many aspects of a person's life and it is important to not only address immediate medical needs but also major determinants of a person's health status.



Prioritization Process

St. Mary's Health Care System used the following process to prioritize the identified needs that the health system would attempt to address:

- A.** All the findings and data were read and analyzed for needs and recurring themes within the identified needs.
- B.** Reference was made to the content of the focused interviews for identified needs from community members.
- C.** Comparisons were made with these two topics and compared to what had been the common knowledge and experience of the clinical staff in the hospital, especially in the Emergency Department.
- D.** This information was presented to our Community Advisory Council that we called together.
- E.** The Advisory Council discussed the findings and made recommendations.
- F.** The Advisory Council's recommendations coincided with what had been said through the focused interviews and data collection.
- G.** These identified needs were presented to the senior leadership of the hospital for decision making based on our mission and values as well as our personnel and financial capability. This group prioritized these actions based on what the hospital system could enact first.



Recommended Priorities

A group of community members representing different interests or parts of the health care system in Athens-Clarke County were involved in a discussion to identify the most important needs of our community. The following needs were recognized by this Community Advisory Council as the most important issues that must be addressed to improve the health and quality of life in our community.

1. Increase access to health care by:
 - Addressing barriers such as lack of health insurance, education, transportation, legal documentation, and literacy.
 - Facilitating the creation of medical homes in order to reduce the use of emergency departments for primary care.
 - Increasing the capacity of the community based clinics.
2. Health care needs and barriers faced by the uninsured or underinsured (“working poor”)
 - Primary care
 - Specialty care
 - Dental care
3. Treat, educate, and prevent chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension (especially targeting low income groups).
 - Promote community gardens to address nutrition
 - Commit to providing follow up care when screenings or tests are given to low income or uninsured individuals.
4. Increased coordination within the health care system.
5. Decrease poverty caused by such things as unemployment, health disparities, homelessness, and illness.



Conclusion

This Community Health Needs Assessment has provided St. Mary's with a more complete picture of the health of Athens-Clarke County. It was undertaken in order to identify the current needs and existing assets of our community and to learn how to best respond to those needs within the scope of our services and partnerships. Through the compilation of data and community input, we have identified several major health needs that affect a large percentage of our community. Also, through this process we have been able to explore what role St. Mary's will play in meeting those needs.

The number of people without health insurance and the effects of this insecurity are great throughout the Athens community. We are currently a member of the Athens Health Network which is working diligently and collaboratively to address the needs of specifically the uninsured and underinsured population. At present, St. Mary's hold a leadership position in this new endeavor. We will continue active participation in the Athens Health Network as it works to address the needs of the uninsured population in such areas as access to primary health care, dental care, specialty care, and treatment for chronic diseases.

Chronic conditions, especially obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, were identified over and over as major health problems in our community. This only confirmed what the hospital system had already experienced in caring for the community. These conditions are all inter-related and can all lead to serious health problems if left untreated or unmanaged. St. Mary's hopes to strategically address these issues through increased community outreach focused on health education and health care for these three conditions. Over the next three years, we hope to continue to partner with community organizations to reduce the prevalence of obesity, diabetes, and hypertension in Athens-Clarke County.

The final challenge that St. Mary's has identified that our hospital system will work to address is the need for housing for homeless families. Through our partnership with Habitat for Humanity, St. Mary's is contributing both funds and personnel to a project that will house more than 16 families in the Athens community. Providing housing is the first step to creating stability for a homeless family. Once a family has some type of permanent home, they can begin to seek employment and even health care. St. Mary's is privileged to be partnering with Athens Area Habitat for Humanity.

Endeavors such as these will also enhance our Community Benefit reporting both to the State of Georgia and on our IRS 990 schedule H. Locally, St. Mary's continues to grow as the community advocate for compassionate care as voiced by our community partners.

Having a completed Community Health Needs Assessment is a powerful tool for directing St. Mary's continued community outreach. As a non-profit, faith based health care system, we are committed to serving our community and especially those in need. We continue to be actively involved in community partnerships through leadership roles on boards and organizations in Athens (e.g. Athens Health Network, Mercy Health Center, Parish Nurses Resource Center, and MCG/UGA Medical Partnership).

This comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment report has provided St. Mary's with quality information to continue to better serve our community.

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