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Norton County Community Health Needs Assessment

Final Report

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# Process Overview

Wichita State University’s Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE) was contracted by the Norton County Hospital to conduct a community assessment of Norton County on health and related issues.

CARE modified the community survey used for a similar assessment in 2018 for use in 2021. Following approval of the survey by representatives of Norton County Hospital, CARE secured Institutional Review Board approval from WSU for protection of human subjects. CARE then programed the survey into Qualtrics, an online surveying platform, and provided the link and an electronic version for printing to Norton County Hospital representatives for distribution. Surveys were collected between April 12th and May 17th, 2021. Paper surveys collected in the community were mailed to CARE by Norton County Hospital. One hundred eighty-three (183) surveys were collected and analyzed for this report.

# A community forum was held following the compilation of a preliminary report of findings from the survey in order for community members to provide input regarding their reactions to the results. At the forum, CARE researchers presented the results and gathered feedback regarding what seemed accurate, what seemed inconsistent with participants’ experiences/perceptions, and other comments that would be helpful to Norton County Hospital as it moves forward with their planning process. The themed responses from participants at the community forum follow the key findings below.

# Primary Health Concerns and Needs – Executive Summary

Across all questions and responses, the following were the **primary health concerns/needs** for Norton County:

**Healthcare access and affordability are top concerns in Norton County, highlighted by desires for retention of providers and increased investment into the healthcare system.**

Good access to healthcare was most important to respondents in creating a healthy community (68.6%). Affordable healthcare was most often listed in the top 3 needs for community health (62.4%). Three-quarters of respondents (74.0%) left Norton for at least some of their healthcare services. Seeing specialist(s) was the top reason that respondents received care outside of Norton County (68.6%). Twenty-five percent (24.8%) of respondents considered healthcare specialists one of the top needs for community health.

When asked what suggestions they have to improve healthcare as a whole, respondents said retain doctors and healthcare services within the community through increased investment into the healthcare system, new facilities, and continued efforts to recruit and train local providers.

**Behavioral health is a concern in Norton County.**

Respondents said that abusing illegal drugs (not prescriptions) is the behavior that most often contributes to health issues in the community (57.2%). Mental/behavioral health was the second most commonly identified condition that respondents believe has the greatest impact on their community’s health (47.7%). In the open-ended comments, some participants also mentioned the need for more stringent enforcement of drug laws, less stigma against those with an addiction, better education for young people and community members (especially law enforcement), and more behavioral health services.

**Support for policies that prohibit the use of commercial tobacco products in public spaces is high.**

A majority of respondents support policies that prohibit the use of commercial tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes, chewing tobacco, vaping products) in all outdoor spaces that are open to the general public (e.g., parks, trails, sidewalks) (73.0%). An even higher percentage support these policies in all indoor spaces that are open to the general public, including private businesses where the public may go (e.g., food pantries, restaurants, hospitals) (89.6%).

**Healthy eating is a challenge in Norton County.**

The highest percentage of respondents disagree that their community has sufficient options for healthy eating (33.6%). Respondents indicated that more options to purchase healthy foods and education on healthy eating would allow them to consume healthier foods.

**Options for physical activity could be improved.**

While 57.9% of respondents indicated their community has sufficient options for physical activity, respondents said the top 3 resources that would allow them to be more physically active are walking/biking paths/trails, an activity center/additional community activities, and improved/expanded sidewalks.

**Cancer was perceived to have the greatest impact on community health.**

Fifty-four percent (54.2%) of respondents put this in the top 3 greatest impacts on community health.

# Key Findings

* Almost all respondents answered the survey in English (99.5%).
* More than three-quarters of respondents were women (81.0%).
* More respondents were 50-64 years old (31.4%) or 35 to 49 years old (25.6%) than any other age groups.
* Less than 2% of respondents were of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin (1.8%). Nearly all respondents were white (98.2%).
* More than three-quarters of respondents use health insurance (e.g., private insurance, Blue Cross Blue Shield, HMO) to pay for their healthcare (77.4%).
* Top three sources of health information reported: doctor/health professional, internet, and health department
* Top three factors that respondents believe are the most important in creating a healthy community: good access to healthcare, good jobs/strong economy, good schools
* Top three conditions that respondents believe have the greatest overall impact on their community’s health: cancer, mental/behavioral health, and health issues due to aging (arthritis, etc.)
* Top three behaviors that respondents believe contribute most to health issues in their community: abusing illegal drugs (not prescriptions), not being physically active, and eating poorly
* Top three greatest needs respondents reported regarding health in their community: affordable healthcare, continuity of care, and evening or weekend clinic hours
* Overall, respondents think their community in Norton County is a healthy place to live, and that Norton County overall is a healthy place to live.
* Overall, respondents agree that their community has sufficient opportunities for physical activity.
* Overall, respondents disagree that their community has sufficient options for healthy eating.
* Overall, respondents strongly support policies that prohibit the use of commercial tobacco products in all outdoor and indoor spaces that are open to the general public.
* Overall, respondents agree that community conditions (e.g., housing, transportation, education) impact overall health.
* Almost all respondents have received healthcare services in at least one location in Norton County in the last two years, and nearly three-quarters reported that this was due to convenience (73.1%).
* Three-quarters of respondents have gone outside Norton County to receive healthcare services in the last two years (74.0%), and more than half reported that this was due to another healthcare facility providing the specialist(s) they needed (68.6%).
* The top themes for open-ended questions regarding needs/suggestions for physical activity and healthy eating were the need for walking/biking paths/trails, more community activities/resources for adults and families, improved/more sidewalks, and more options for purchase of healthy foods (at grocery stores, restaurants/fast food, Farmers Markets, etc.).
* The primary themes in the open-ended question about what could be done to improve health in Norton County were retention of doctors/healthcare within the community, better customer service/management in healthcare, expanded healthcare options (including for behavioral health), and affordability of healthcare.

# Community Forum Input

In order to gather further input on the survey results, a community forum/meeting was held via Zoom with representatives from the hospital and larger community. Attendees were asked to provide feedback on the following:

* What resonates or sounds most accurate about the results?
* Is there anything that seems inconsistent with your perception of the community?
* What seems most important from these findings?
* Is there anything Norton County Hospital needs to know or consider for planning purposes?

Although participants did not have many comments about what seems accurate or anything that was inconsistent with their experience, they did express concern about the low response rate to the community survey and whether the results accurately reflect the community. Norton Hospital administrators explained how the survey was publicized as well as the next steps that will involve further community discussion as a way to counter the low response rates. Participants also discussed ideas for increasing the response rate in future assessments. CARE staff and another participant also provided context regarding the overall issue of survey rates dropping in general, even in large scale surveys such as the census, etc.

In response to the question regarding what seems most important, several participants offered the following:

* Although specialty care may be less available in smaller communities, there is more personalized or individualized care. That helps build trust even though not all needs can be met.
* People are more likely to complain than to give “attaboys.”
* A common concern heard from older adults by one participant is that diagnoses received from local providers are sometimes deemed misdiagnoses by specialists outside the county. The participant suggested providing more training to local doctors in specialty areas such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, among others.
* For parents, scheduling is an issue and it seems to have gotten worse even though Norton County has more providers now. When children have urgent health issues, such as an ear infection, this participant has found it easier to get a same-day appointment with a provider in another community where they have specialists and greater capacity.

When asked if there was anything else the hospital should know, one participant asked if there are any metrics regarding how many people go elsewhere for healthcare services that could be provided in Norton County. Norton Hospital CEO, Gina Frack, responded that they do measure “out-migration” but due to being so close to Nebraska, getting accurate numbers is difficult. Participants discussed the need to better inform the community about existing services to address this concern. Participants also noted that sustainability of Norton County and the surrounding communities is dependent upon people spending money locally, including on healthcare. Efforts to highlight resources and support community growth are essential to maintaining a good quality of life in Norton County.

# Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) Results

One hundred and eighty-three individuals answered at least one question on the CHNA. Not all respondents answered every question. Individual counts of respondents for each question are listed as (n=x).

## Respondent Demographics

###

### Question 1: Do you speak Spanish or are you assisting someone who speaks Spanish? (n=183)

Figure 1.

### Question 2: What is your gender identity? Select all that apply. (n=168)

Figure 2.

### Question 3: What is your age? (n=121)

No respondents chose the option for under 18 years.

Figure 3.

### Question 4: Are you of Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin? (n=166)

Figure 4.

### Question 5: What race(s) best describe you? Select all that apply. (n=166)

No respondents chose African American/Black, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Figure 5.

### Question 6: What is your annual household income (before taxes)? (n=152)

Figure 6.

### Question 7: What is the highest level of education you have completed? (n=165)

Figure 7.

### Question 8: Are you a parent who currently has children in the home under the age of 18 years? (n=165)

Figure 8.

### Question 9: How do you pay for your healthcare? Select all that apply. (n=164)

No respondents chose the option for Indian Health Services.

Figure 9.

“Other” responses included: Medicare supplement insurance, United World through Mutual of Omaha, TriCare for Life, and Christian Healthcare Ministries.

### Question 10: Where do you and your family get most of your health information? Please select your TOP THREE choices. (n=162)

Figure 10.

“Other” responses included: Medical journals, university libraries, and the CDC.

### Question 11: What is the zip code where you live? (n=153)

Table 1.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Zip code | Location | Percent of Responses |
| 67654 | Norton, KS | 69.3% |
| 67622 | Almena, KS | 12.4% |
| 67645 | Lenora, KS | 7.8% |
| 67664 | Prairie View, KS | 3.3% |
| 67629 | Clayton, KS | 2.0% |
| 67647 | Long Island, KS | 1.3% |

One respondent was represented from each of the following zip codes: 67646, 69036, 67653, 67522. Two other respondents entered invalid zip codes.

## Survey Results

###

### Question 12: From the following list, please select the TOP THREE factors that you believe are the most important in creating a healthy community. (n=159)

Figure 11.

“Other” responses included:

* Childcare/Daycare
* “The hospital not suing you after a child is in the hospital. Makes it hard to pay housing and utilities… let alone feed them. You are a part of the problem and not the solution.”
* All of them

### Question 13: From the following list, please select the TOP THREE conditions that you believe have the greatest overall impact on your community's health. (n=153)

Figure 12.

“Other” responses included:

* “Freeloaders”
* “Lack of information and teaching on what to do to be healthy”
* “Tax-free stuff”

### Question 14: From the following list, please select the TOP THREE behaviors that you believe contribute most to health issues in your community. (n=152)

Figure 13.

“Other” responses included:

* “Abusing illegal drugs, prescriptions, and alcohol all go hand in hand.”
* “Low income”
* “Tax-free”

### Question 15: From the following list, please select what you believe to be the TOP THREE greatest needs regarding health in your community. (n=149)

Figure 14.

“Other” responses included:

* Quality healthcare and providers, including doctors who are well trained and experienced
* “Getting quality healthcare here in Norton, not being sent to a bigger hospital.”
* “Need to be patient oriented, instead of business oriented.”
* In-person mental health resources
* “Better information/guidelines are needed and reiterated often.”
* “Health services are great. Billing and processing insurance is a nightmare. Dealing with the business office is absolutely horrible. Things are sometimes not processed for 6 months to a year and then they want to send you to collections. Have separate bills for each encounter and they apply all to one and then call the others as late and turn over to collections. Need to fix the business portion of the care process.”
* “Lower prices of services offered. Some visits only 15 minutes and charged outrageous price for that.”
* “Requiring certain amount of payments.”
* “Tax-free”

### Question 16: Please complete the following statements: I think my community in Norton County is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ place to live. (n=151)

Figure 15.

Table 2. Percentage of responses for top three zip codes

|  |
| --- |
| “I think my community in Norton County is a \_\_\_\_\_\_ place to live.” |
|  | **Very unhealthy** | **Unhealthy** | **Neither healthy nor unhealthy** | **Healthy** | **Very healthy** |
| 67654 – Norton, KS (n=106) | 0.0% | 11.6% | 21.1% | 62.1% | 5.3% |
| 67622 – Almena, KS (n=19) | 5.6% | 16.7% | 27.8% | 44.4% | 5.6% |
| 67645 – Lenora, KS (n=12) | 0.0% | 0.0% | 41.7% | 50.0% | 8.3% |

### Question 17: Please complete the following statements: I think Norton County overall is a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ place to live. (n=152)

Figure 16.

### Question 18: In general, my community has sufficient opportunities for physical activity. (n=152)

Figure 17.

### Question 19: In general, my community has sufficient options for healthy eating. (n=152)

Figure 18.

### Question 20: Please rate your level of support for policies that prohibit the use of commercial tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes, chewing tobacco, vaping products) in all outdoor spaces that are open to the general public (e.g., parks, trails, sidewalks). (n=144)

Figure 19.

### Question 21: Please rate your level of support for policies that prohibit the use of commercial tobacco products (e.g., cigarettes, chewing tobacco, vaping products) in all indoor spaces that are open to the general public, including private businesses where the public may go (e.g., food pantries, restaurants, hospitals). (n=145)

Figure 20.

### Question 22: Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: Community conditions (e.g., housing, transportation, education) impact overall health. (n=147)

Figure 21.

### Question 23: I have received healthcare services at the following locations in Norton County in the last two years (select all that apply). (n=148)

Figure 22.

### Question 24: Please tell us what contributed to you seeking healthcare services in Norton County. Please select all that apply. (n=130)

Figure 23.

“Other” responses included:

* Emergencies
* “Emergency otherwise I go to Oberlin”
* Place of employment
* “POA”

### Question 25: I have gone outside of Norton County to receive healthcare services in the last two years. (n=146)

No respondents chose the option for “unsure”.

Figure 24.

### Question 26: Please tell us what contributed to you seeking healthcare services at another healthcare facility outside of Norton County. Please select all that apply. (n=105)

Figure 25.

“Other” responses included:

* “Just moved here within the last year”
* “I was told that unless I’m “deathly ill”, I should not make any appointments by Norton Medical Clinic. I have some chronic conditions that require routine follow-up care, so that was very disappointing to hear.”
* “The ability to receive a discount for payment in full for services rendered after insurance has paid.”
* “They actually listen and don’t just run one blood test and say nothing is wrong.”
* “I lived in another community.”
* “You aren’t treated rudely and you get your test results as soon as they are ready. Also, they work with a more reasonable payment plan and don’t turn paying customers into collections.”
* “The quality providers with knowledge and wisdom to get to the root of a problem not just treating symptoms. They listen to a patient, make use of all testing equipment, departments to efficiently diagnose.”
* “Gall bladder and appendix removal”
* “Billing and customer service in that area.”
* “Less wait time in office”
* “Mammogram at Hays (doesn’t hurt as much as at Norton)”

### Question 27: Are you aware of the Pathways to a Healthy Kansas initiative that is being implemented by Live Well Norton in Norton County? (n=142)

Figure 26.

### Question 28: What additional resources in your community would allow you to be more physically active?

The following themes emerged from 60 responses, listed in order of frequency. The total across all themes will not equal 60 because respondents may have mentioned several issues in each answer.

1. **Walking/biking paths/trails (n=24) –** The largest number of comments were focused on the need for walking/hiking/biking trails that connect the community to the state park.Specific comments noted the need for paths/trails to have multiple entry points in the community. A general need for more areas to safely walk on sidewalks throughout the community was also noted.
2. **Activity center/additional community activities (n=21)** – The second most common response was related to the need for community facilities and activities that provide community members with no-cost or affordable options for exercise and socializing. Specific comments suggested options for bowling, miniature golf, family activities, rock climbing wall, and yoga/Pilates classes. Some specified that the existing gyms are too expensive.
3. **Improved/expanded sidewalks (n=15)** **–** This theme connected with the theme of walking/hiking/biking paths to some extent. Many respondents noted the lack of sidewalks across the community as a major barrier to exercise. Additionally, several commented on concerns about stickers making sidewalks/walking areas unsafe and unappealing for regular activity.
4. **Exercise options for adults (n=9)** **–** This theme included suggestions regarding putting exercise equipment in parks for adults, starting more organized activities that go beyond the typical sports teams, and providing opportunities targeted to those over 50.
5. **Indoor swimming pool (n=9) –** One comment focused on how crowded the public pool is during the summer, but all others suggested there should be a year-round, indoor pool available to the community.
6. **Other (n=11) –** A small number of comments that did not fit into other themes included such issues as the need for public education about exercise and nutrition, better enforcement of leash laws/dog control efforts, and a dog park. Other comments were about personal ability/motivation to exercise. None of the comments in this theme were mentioned more than twice.

### Question 29: What additional resources in your community would allow you to consume healthier foods?

The following themes emerged from 68 responses, listed in order of frequency.

1. **More options to purchase healthy foods (n=85; NOTE: The number of comments in this theme is more than the total number who responded because each comment was counted separately, e.g., one person may have made 4 separate comments related to healthy foods) –** The majority of comments focused on the lack of options for purchasing healthy foods in the community. These comments included the following suggestions:
	1. Better selection of produce at grocery store
	2. More affordable produce/fresh/healthy foods at grocery store
	3. More grocery stores, including health food stores
	4. More healthy dining options for restaurants/fast food
	5. More support for Farmers’ Markets/longer season for Farmers’ Markets
2. **Education on healthy eating (n=4) –** A few participants suggested the need for education on healthy eating to help community members understand the importance of proper nutrition, learn how to cook healthy meals, and get assistance from professionals regarding special considerations for various health conditions.
3. **Other (n=5) –** A few comments did not fit into any theme but included the suggestion of a local butcher, praise for the “Meals on Monday” program for seniors, and the suggestion of yoga and self-defense classes.

### Question 30: What other comments or suggestions do you have to improve healthcare in your specific community or in Norton County as a whole?

The following themes emerged from 49 responses, listed in order of frequency. In addition to comments that repeated the themes described in the previous two questions (e.g., more options for adult exercise, sidewalks, education on healthy behaviors, etc.), themes for this question included:

1. **Maintain doctors/healthcare within community (n=12) –** The largest number of respondents commented on the need to maintain medical/healthcare services within the community. A number of comments praised the system and doctors already in the community. However, a few suggested increased investments into the healthcare system, new facilities, and continued efforts to recruit and train local providers.
2. **Better customer service/management in healthcare** **(n=10)** **–** This theme is linked with affordability of healthcare in terms of the concerns expressed regarding the expense and options for payment. However, the tone of many of the comments indicated a concern that the healthcare system focuses more on money than clients’ needs. Several respondents were critical of the hospital and its administration as well as clinic practices related to confidentiality and harassment regarding billing. A few comments in this theme focused on the difficulty in scheduling appointments as well as in getting timely lab/test results.
3. **Expanded healthcare options (n=9) –** This theme echoes one of the primary themes of the 2018 Community Health Needs Assessment in that the largest number of participants noted the need for additional healthcare options within the community. The specific suggestions included improved access to specialists or specialized care within the community (e.g., for children, dialysis, etc.), more clinics and extended hours for health services, a new hospital, and in-home care.
4. **Affordability of healthcare (n=6) –** Again similar to 2018, affordability was mentioned as a concern. Specifically, respondents noted issues with the cost of services/resources such as pregnancy tests/other lab work and the overall expense of insurance. They also noted concerns about being sued for inability to pay and a desire for more payment options and/or discounts.
5. **Behavioral Health (n=4) –** A few participants mentioned the need for a better community response to mental health issues and substance abuse. Specifically, the need for more stringent enforcement of drug laws, less stigma against those with an addiction, better education for young people and community members (especially law enforcement), and more behavioral health services.
6. **Other (n=8) –** A few participants suggested such issues or approaches as the need for community engagement to support those in need, more accessible and affordable childcare options and activities for children, and concerns regarding the impact of Covid. No one issue was mentioned more than three times.

# About the Community Engagement Institute (CEI)

**Wichita State University’s Community Engagement Institute (CEI) is dedicated to improving the health of Kansans through leadership development, research and evaluation, organizational capacity building, community collaboration, and public health and behavioral health initiatives. CEI maintains six Centers with skilled staff that work directly with community coalitions, nonprofits, government entities, health and human services organizations, and support groups. The Centers are:**

* Center for Applied Research and Evaluation
* Center for Behavioral Health Initiatives
* Center for Leadership Development
* Center for Organizational Development and Collaboration
* Center for Public Health Initiatives
* IMPACT Center