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Housing Initiatives Implementation in Vermont to Improve Health Outcomes

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Introduction

Research demonstrates compelling relationships between housing and health:

- Patients with housing insecurity have increased rates of respiratory disease, chronic illness, and challenges with medication management.
- Secure housing resulted in fewer hospital visits and shorter hospital stays.
- Collaborative Cottage Grove showed poor housing was linked to asthma, diabetes and hypertensive hospitalization.
- Improved housing conditions for patients with asthma improved health and reduced health care costs for those with asthma.

Vermont Department of Health goals include controlling health care costs; improve quality, and improve population health outcomes, including attention to social determinants of health, including housing.

Housing initiatives require significant financial and labor contributions; studies have shown a long-term return of investment.

- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has generated state innovation models (SIMs) to increase necessary services for high risk patients, including housing assistance.
- Medicaid has been used to support many related-programs. Examples include increased care coordination to find housing, help paying for heaters, temporary assistance with rent and accommodation for homeless individuals.

Objective

- Assess what Accountable Communities for Health are implementing related to housing initiatives to alleviate the burdens of social determinants on health.

Methodology

Participants:

Interviewed 7 hospital county leaders in Addison, Bennington, Caledonia, Chittenden, Orange, Washington, and Winsor counties.

Interview:

Phone interview format.

Assessed three categories (1) housing (2) community partners related to improving housing and (3) other priorities for improving social determinants of health.

Results

Evaluation of Community Housing Needs

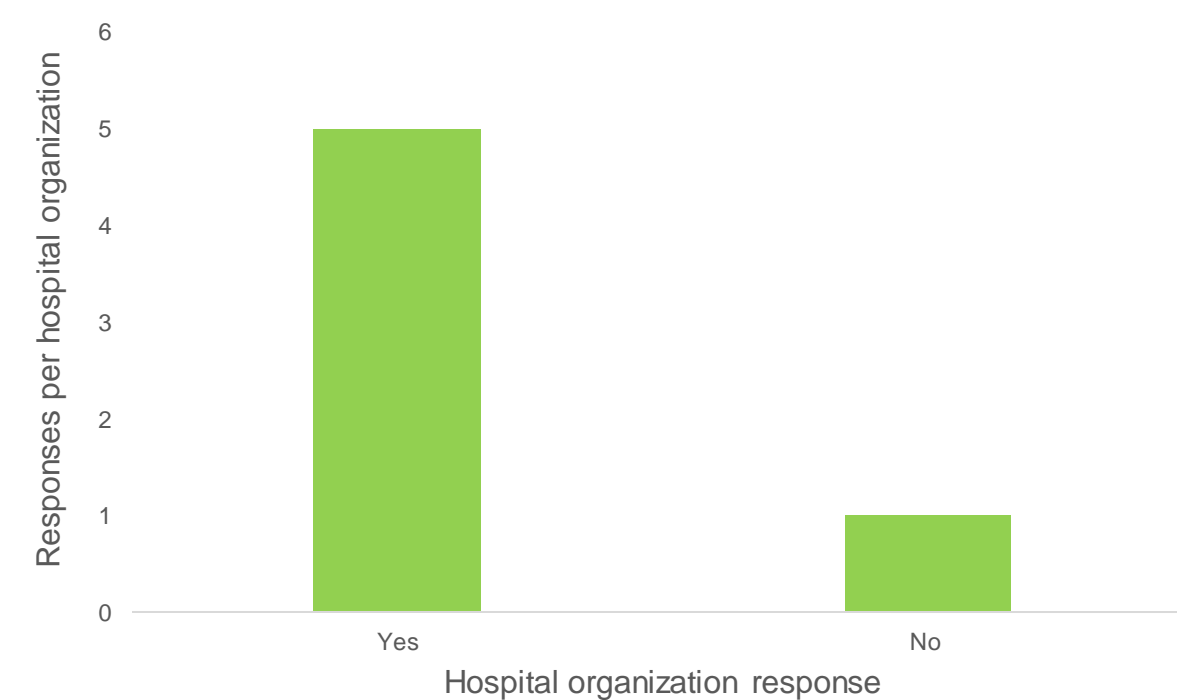


Figure 1. The majority of hospitals interviewed evaluated community housing needs. Hospital representatives reported the use of community health needs assessments as a means to evaluate community housing needs.

Community Needs as Identified by the Community Health Needs Assessment

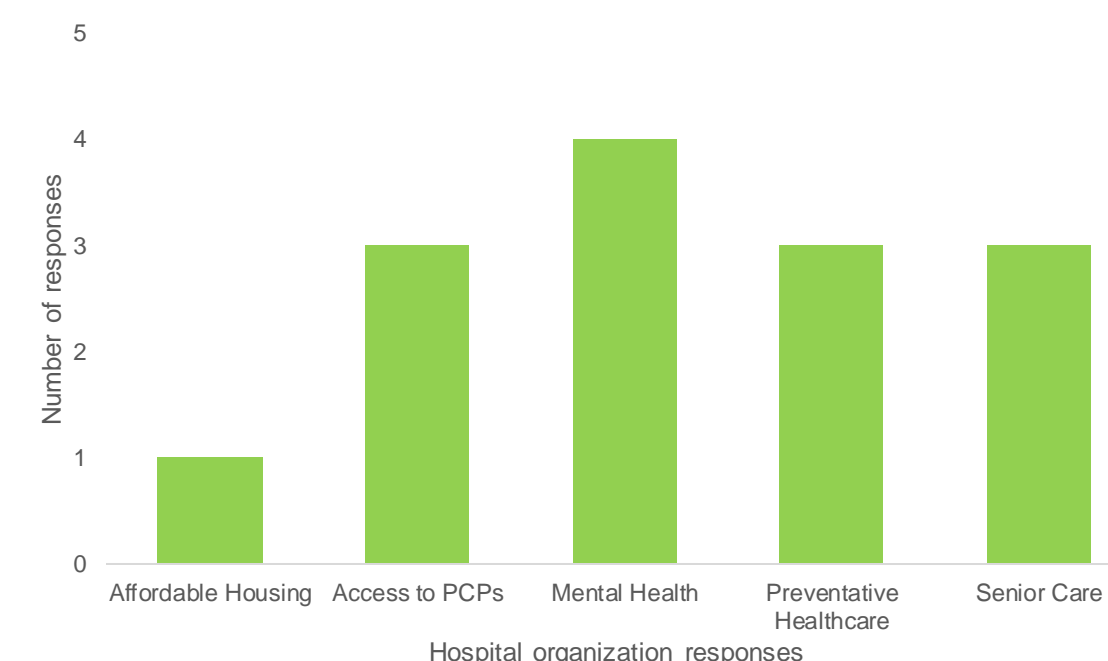


Figure 3. Community Health Needs Assessments show housing is a minor area of need.

Hospital Leaders Discuss Barriers to Expanding Housing

"[It's] limited resources and the fact that [housing] is not the hospital's primary mission."

"Housing has complex implications. It's not necessarily the first choice to tackle in a health care system."

"It's not because of the will to do it, it may be lack of a clear plan or proposal of what needs to be done."

Identified Barriers of Housing Expansion

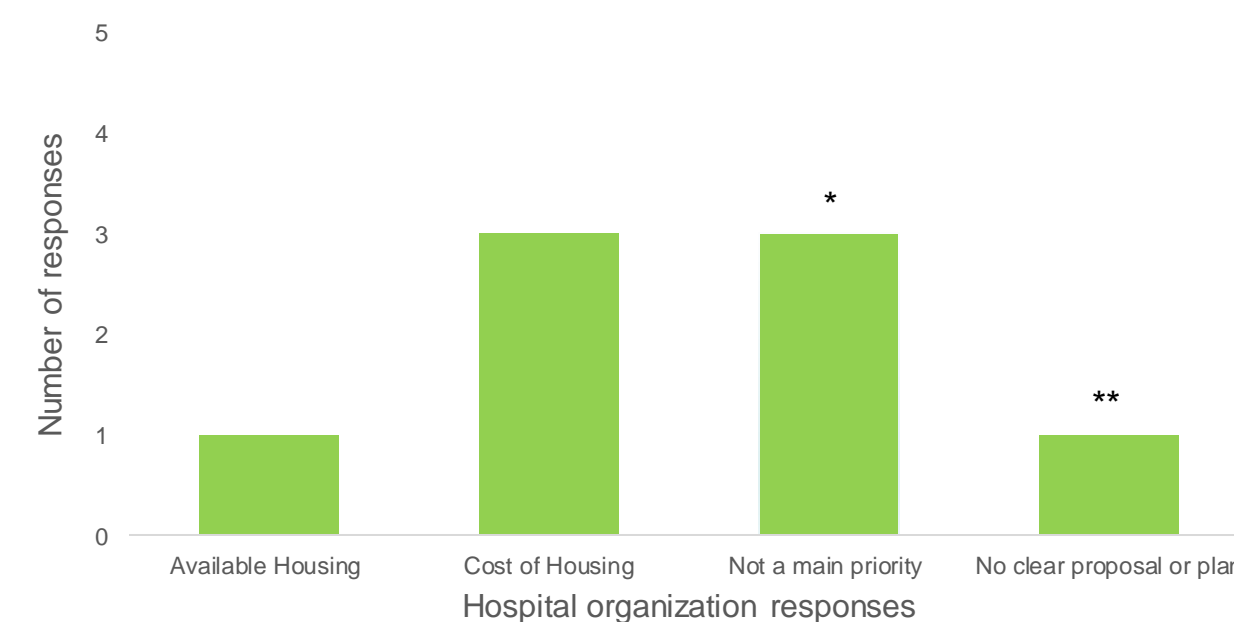


Figure 2. Major barriers to housing expansion include cost and focus in other areas.

*Hospitals not prioritizing housing expansion in their mission.

**Hospitals interviewed reported that they were unsure of how to address housing problems or were in need of assistance with planning resolutions.

Priorities for Community Investment

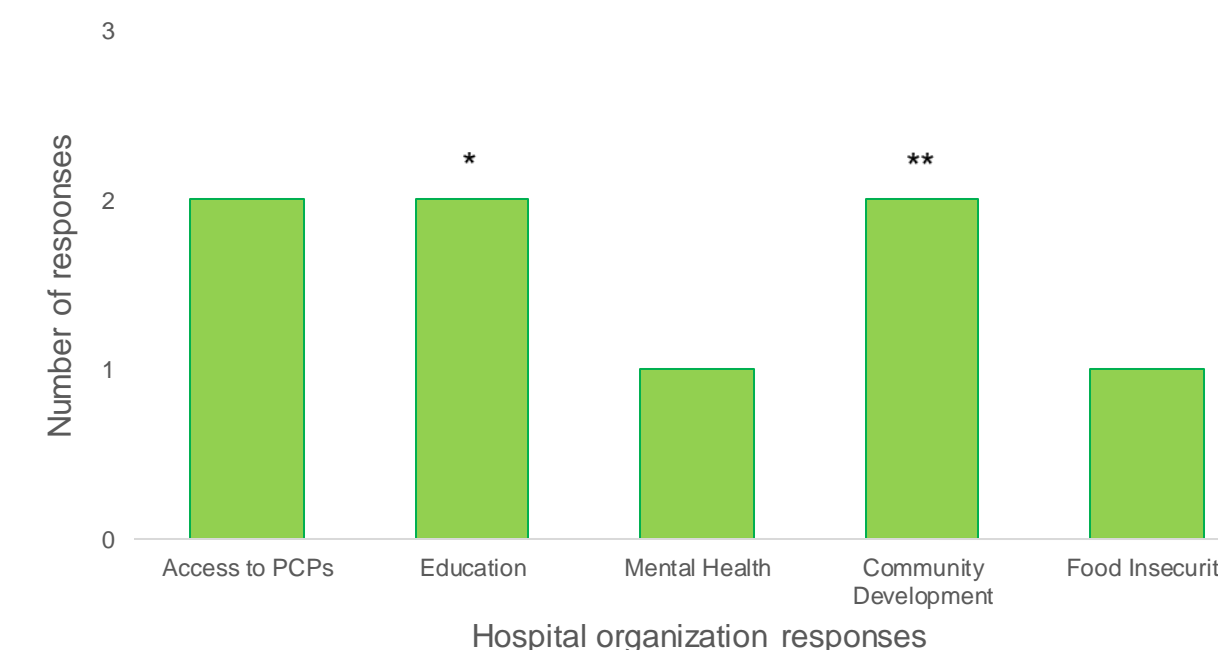


Figure 4. Community investments by healthcare.

*Education in healthy lifestyles and habits.

**Local economic and business projects.

Discussion

- Housing remains a major public health issue across the state of Vermont.
- Hospital organization are burdened by other issues such as healthcare access that prevent them from focusing on addressing the current housing crisis in Vermont.
- Additional state housing agencies should be contacted to better understand how housing problems are addressed in these communities.
- Identified barriers to expanding housing were financial limitations and perceived lack of need.
- The primary limitations of this study include was a small sample size.
- A total of 14 individuals were contacted (as representing the Accountable Communities for Health) to participate in the study, and only 7 were able to complete the study.
- Of the 7 that were able to complete the study interview, there was a variable degree of knowledge about community housing needs. This inconsistency in responses may have resulted in a poor assessment of hospitals across the state.

Recommendations

- A future housing assessment study that involves a larger sample size and has more refined criteria for those interviewed would allow for a more complete understanding of the Vermont housing crisis and how different regions of Vermont are addressing this problem.
- This has potential to contribute positively to addressing social determinants of health in Vermont and furthering connections with health care organizations.

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