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Healthcare Barriers of Residents at a Subsidized Housing Community

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Authors
INTRODUCTION
Despite expanded healthcare programs, the low income and elderly lack coverage of vision, hearing, and dental services.1,2 Community services are often asked to fill these gaps.3,4 To evaluate the situation in Burlington, VT, we surveyed staff and residents in Burlington Housing Authority (BHA) subsidized housing to (1) identify gaps in healthcare coverage and (2) assess barriers to accessing those services in this population.

METHODS
Surveys were distributed to the first 50 residents at a BHA event and to all 4 members of the BHA Wellness Center staff to discuss Medicare coverage and the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging and local Center staff to assess their perceptions. We consulted BHA event and to all 4 members of the BHA Wellness alternative community resources for vision, dental, and mental health was distributed to residents.

RESULTS

Fig. 1. Services utilized in past year

Fig. 2. Services unable to be utilized by residents in past year

Table 1. Characteristics of resident survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY NAME</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance coverage/experience</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No companion</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Study population: 45 out of 165 residents responded to the survey (Table 1). All 4 staff members involved in wellness responded.

Staff survey: All staff recognized that residents lacked dental care, but none identified residents’ vision care needs.

Workshop: Twelve residents and 4 staff members attended the workshop. Workshop attendees represented a highly vocal and active subsection of the total BHA population.

Healthcare utilization and barriers
- Study population: 45 out of 165 residents responded to the survey (Table 1). All 4 staff members involved in wellness responded.
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- Workshop: Twelve residents and 4 staff members attended the workshop. Workshop attendees represented a highly vocal and active subsection of the total BHA population.

Healthcare utilization and barriers: Check ups, blood work, and filling prescriptions were the most frequent reasons for utilizing healthcare (Figure 1); residents were most often unable to access dental and vision care (Figure 2). Patients identified cost as the greatest barrier to service utilization (Figure 3). All 8 respondents who were unable to receive dental care also marked insurance or expense as a barrier.

DISCUSSION
Our survey results identified vision and dental care as major gaps in healthcare coverage. Dentures are not covered under Medicare or Medicaid and are especially unattainable without payment plans. Lack of dentures contributes to poor diet in aging populations4 and costly health issues in the future.

Community-founded programs aim to provide services not covered by insurance. While programs like the Lion’s Club provide affordable eyeglasses, there are no affordable community options for dentures. BHA residents voiced frustration about unsuccessful attempts to acquire dentures through community resources. Wellness services at BHA are provided by a Support and Services at Home (SASH) program funded by Medicare. However, program resources are limited to two coordinators and one rotating nurse and do not address the residents’ need for eyeglasses and/or dentures.

These results demonstrate a population that is well-covered by health insurance but is still facing persistent and concerning healthcare needs. Such barriers undermine the preventive goals of Medicare and Medicaid. Although charities and community programs cover some gaps in coverage, it is plain that without additional state or federal aid, these needs will continue to go largely unmet.

REFERENCES

Fig. 3. Barriers identified by residents.

Study population: 45 out of 165 residents responded to the survey (Table 1). All 4 staff members involved in wellness responded.

 taught Tom Delaney and Rajan Chawla for guidance.