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Healthcare Barriers of Residents at a Subsidized Housing Community

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INTRODUCTION

Despite expanded healthcare programs, the low income and elderly lack coverage of vision, hearing, and dental services. Community services are often asked to fill these gaps. 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 assess their perceptions. We consulted the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging and local community services to discuss Medicare coverage and to identify alternative resources. Results were summarized for staff in a fact sheet and were presented at a workshop at the BHA. A packet of alternative community resources for vision, dental, and mental health was distributed to residents.

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Residents</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Residents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (SD)</td>
<td>57 (15)</td>
<td>18-91+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASH</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicaid</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Characteristics of resident survey respondents

**Fig. 1. Services utilized in past year**

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

**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.
- **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:** 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).

**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 populations 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**

4. Sathyur R., Lin C., Kroll E. Nutritional status of the older adult is covered under Medicare or Medicaid and are especially unattainable without payment plans. Lack of dentures contributes to poor diet in aging populations and costly health issues in the future.

**Table 1. Characteristics of resident survey respondents**

**Fig. 3. Barriers identified by residents.**

- **Insurance coverage/expense**
- **Transportation**
- **No companion**
- **SASH**
- **Insurance**
- **Medicare**
- **Medicaid**
- **Euthanasia**
- **No response**

*Since Medicare and Medicaid have no coverage for routine denture or vision services, insurance coverage and expense were interpreted to be the same barrier.

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