



Prairie County Community Health Assessment



Prairie County Public Health
Department

2017

Acknowledgements

The Prairie County Health Department would like to acknowledge the following community leaders, local organizations and stakeholders who contributed their time and valuable information throughout the Community Health Assessment process:

- Deanna Bockness, Prairie County Commissioner
- Rolane Christofferson, Mayor, Town of Terry
- Todd Devlin, Prairie County Commissioner
- Laurie Lea Durham, Prairie Community Hospital CEO
- Samuel “Chip” Mintz, PA-C, Prairie County Health Officer
- Megan Olson, RN, County Health Nurse, Prairie County Health Department
- Dennis Teske, Prairie County Commissioner
- Prairie Community Hospital and Prairie County Clinic
- Board of Health Members
- Council on Aging Members

Funding for this project was provided through a grant from the Montana DPHHS Public Health and Safety Division and the Montana Healthcare Foundation.



Executive Summary

The purpose of our community health assessment was to get a measurable description of the health-related challenges and issues our citizens face in our rural area. After gathering and analyzing the data obtained, the stakeholders and other partners can determine what issues and/or services can be improved or implemented to improve access to care. Our rural setting must be taken into consideration when planning these services in order to maintain sustainability of any such services or programs.

The Prairie County Public Health Department's vision is "Staying Healthy on the Prairie," and with that vision, we hope to promote the health and well-being of all the people in Prairie County so they can maintain a satisfactory quality of life.

The aging population played a key role in many of the findings of the data collection. Aging problems and chronic disease were ranked 1st and 2nd as the most important health problems in Prairie County. Aging also coincides with chronic disease not just locally, but on a national level. The United States overall will be much older, with nearly 1 in 5 U.S. residents being 65 years and older by the year 2030 (census.gov).



When asked about the most important factors for a healthy community, those surveyed found that access to health care was ranked highest at 58.6%. Since Terry, the county seat, has a clinic with two providers, a critical care access hospital, an extended care facility, and a public health department the residents do have a number of health care services within the area, given their frontier location and two larger communities within 40 minutes of Terry.



Methodology

The Community Health Survey was created from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Clearinghouse. Survey questions were reviewed and modified by community stakeholders, organizations and community members. These survey questions were then mailed out to a sample of registered voters of Prairie County. Sample of voters was randomly selected. In each mailing was a self-addressed, stamped envelope, along with a ticket for a chance to win \$100 in Prairie County Chamber Bucks, if the survey was completed and mailed back to the Prairie County Health Department. Sample total was 175.

Survey timeline was April 29th, 2016 to June 10th, 2016. Participants had until June 10th to return their surveys and tickets. A total of 70 surveys were returned, which is 40% of the 175 sample.

The community health assessment (CHA) process was conducted with the cooperation and input of the previously listed community leaders, organizations and stakeholders who met during Board of Health meetings, and separate CHA meetings to decide on how to obtain the most accurate information, as well as opinions from the residents of Prairie County regarding their health and well-being. Also of importance, was gaining insight into their opinions of health risks, quality of life, environmental health, and local health care resources available to deal with those issues.

The survey consisted of 27 detailed questions that were mailed to a sample of 175 county residents. Once the data from the returned, completed surveys was compiled and analyzed, the three top factors in each category were highlighted to easily verify areas of concern.

Categories included: Factors for a healthy community, health problems in Prairie County, risky behaviors, overall health of Prairie County, individual health, quality of life, health services received outside of Prairie County, barriers of getting health care locally, potential offered services, environmental issues, health conditions, and demographics.

Key Findings upon looking at data were chronic disease and age-related diseases were at the top of most categories, which would correlate with the higher number of residents age 65 years and older in the county. Another key finding was the number of residents who sought health services such as lab work, Xray/MRI and general practitioner care outside of Prairie County.

Limitations

Limitations to the Prairie County Health Assessment are the following: 1) Sample was derived from registered voters, so a certain demographic of the population was sampled, which limited the variety of people who would receive the survey. 2) The survey was mailed out at the time of year where, in a rural community such as this, the priority to fill out the survey and return it was lower than other priorities such as seeding, haying, and cattle work. 3) Data derived from the survey was self-reported information, which may or may not reflect the respondent's likelihood of reporting certain behaviors.

Data collected from the survey included:

- Factors for a healthy community
- Health problems in Prairie County
- Risky behaviors
- Overall health of Prairie County citizens
- Quality of life questions
- Health service access outside of Prairie County
- Barriers to getting healthcare in Prairie County
- Environmental issues in Prairie County

Background

Prairie County is located in eastern Montana and geographically consists of 1,730 square miles of prairie, badlands, wetlands, pasture and cropland. The county is mainly an agricultural community consisting mostly of cattle, irrigated and dryland farming. Founded in 1915, it offers wide open spaces in which to live, as population is sparse (1,160), but the people are friendly. The Yellowstone River flows through the county north of Terry, which is the county seat and the only incorporated town with a population of 605. Fallon is the only other community with a population of 164. It is home to breathtaking Badlands as well as the world famous and intriguing historical pioneer photographer, Lady Evelyn Cameron.

The main economic providers in Prairie County are farming/ranching, a public k-12 school, a critical access hospital, local health clinic, the railroad, and a handful of small businesses.

The permanent population of Prairie County has fluctuated over recent years due to the impact from the Bakken Oil Boom, which brought people here for housing opportunities, due to limited affordable housing in communities closer to the oil fields. Since oil production in the Bakken has slowed dramatically, the younger, working population has once again decreased, leaving an aging population as the majority of Prairie County residents.

County Demographics

- 58.6% of those surveyed live in Terry, 5.7% live in Fallon, while 32.9% reside in rural parts of the county.
- 52.2% of those surveyed were 65 years and older (17.2% MT), and 22.4 % were 55-64 years old.
- 92.9% of those surveyed described themselves as Caucasian/white (89.2% MT)



Socioeconomics

- 47.1% of those surveyed had a college degree or higher (29.5% MT), and 35.7% have a high school diploma or GED (92.8%)
- Median Household income for those in Prairie County is \$42,383 (\$47,189 MT) *
- Unemployment rate is 4.4% (4.7% MT)*
- Children in poverty 19% (19% MT)*

*Montana Census 2010, Montana DPHHS 2014 Annual Report

Data Summary

Important Factors for a Healthy Community

A healthy community is dependent not only upon its individual residents, but also upon various factors such as health care facilities/departments, healthy economy, clean environment, healthy behaviors/lifestyles, good schools, affordable housing, and community organizations, just to name a few. Some of these factors affect individuals themselves, while others create a cause and effect situation for the population as a whole.

The top five most important factors for a healthy community to those surveyed (n=70) were:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| 1) Access to Health Care | 58.6% |
| 2) Good Place to Raise Children | 41.4% |
| 3) Good Schools | 41.4% |
| 4) Religious or Spiritual Values | 25.7% |
| 5) Low Crime/Safe Neighborhoods | 24.3% |



The most important health problems in Prairie County per survey results:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1) Aging Problems | 78.6% |
| 2) Chronic Disease | 62.9% |
| 3) Alcohol and Other Drug Use | 34.3% (21% MT) |
| 4) Suicide | 22.9% |
| 5) Poor Diet/Inactivity | 21.4% (22% MT) |

Overall health of Prairie County according to the community survey:

Somewhat Healthy	47.8%	Very Unhealthy	2.9%
Healthy	40.6%	Very Healthy	1.5%
Unhealthy	7.3%		

Individual health of surveyed residents (How is your health?):

Somewhat Healthy	45.7%	Very Unhealthy	11.4%
Unhealthy	41.4%	Healthy	1.4%

Risky Behaviors/Lifestyle Choices

Risky Behavior is defined as ill-advised practices and actions that are potentially detrimental to a person's health or general well-being. (Reference.com/psychology). Another definition of risky behavior is a behavior that potentially exposes people to harm, or significant risk of harm which will prevent them from reaching their potential. (Risky Behavior Training Program).

The most important risky behaviors to Prairie County residents surveyed were:

- 1) Alcohol and Drug Abuse 51.4%
- 2) Being Overweight 37.1%
- 3) Tobacco Use 32.9%
- 4) Lack of Exercise 30.0%
- 5) Under Age Drinking 27.1%



Quality of Life

There were 10 questions on the survey that targeted quality of life issues for local county residents. Completed surveys reflected that the majority of residents **"Agreed"** or **"Strongly Agreed"** that they were satisfied with the quality of life in the community. People also **"Strongly Agreed"** or **"Agreed"** that their community was a good place to raise children, grow old, and was a safe place to live. As far as economic opportunities, the majority of people surveyed **"Disagreed"** or were **"Neutral"** in their opinion that the community provided good economic opportunities.

Prairie County residents also gave their opinion of “Agree” or “Neutral” for the categories reflecting:

- Networks of Support for Individuals and Families
- The Opportunity to Contribute to and Participate in the Community’s Quality of Life
- Resident Perceptions That They Can Make the Community a Better Place to Live
- Trust and Respect among Community Partners to Achieve Shared Community Goals
- An Active Sense of Civic Responsibility and Engagement

Health Services

Prairie County does have both a clinic (open five days a week) and a critical-access hospital (open 24/7) which provides a vast array of services in this frontier community. Similar, but bigger hospitals and clinics are also in the nearby communities of Miles City and Glendive (39 and 38 miles respectively).

The following statistics reflect results of the survey in regard to health services.



Health services received outside of Prairie County:

1) Lab Work	51.4%
2) X ray/MRI	44.3%
3) General Practitioner Care	40.0%
4) Chiropractic	25.7%
5) Women’s Health Services	25.7%

Residents cited their reasons for receiving health care outside of Prairie County as their doctor of choice was in another city, or there was no provider for the services they needed (48.6% for both factors).

The survey also addressed barriers to getting health care in Prairie County, and the majority cited “Cost” as the main barrier. Next in line were “fear or distrust of health care system”, and “location of health care/no transportation.”

Potential Offered Services

An overwhelming majority (**83.9%**) of surveyed individuals said they would use **Outpatient Physical Therapy/Rehabilitation services** if it was offered in Terry. The Prairie Community Hospital has recently offered this service in its facility.

Other services surveyed for potential interest were Wellness Center/Gym, and CPR training.





Environmental Health

In 1999, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined environmental health as, “Those aspects of human health and disease that are determined by factors in the environment.” In 2016,

the WHO further stated, “Environmental health addresses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors external to a person and all the related factors impacting behaviors.” Environmental health addresses a number of categories, such as infrastructure, water/food safety, use of chemicals, and animal and vector control.

Infrastructure factors such as sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, vacant lots, and street lighting were marked as **little risk (2)** most frequently on a scale of low risk (1) to high risk (4). Abandoned buildings were ranked as **some risk (3)**. **General pollution** issues such as littering/illegal dumping was ranked as **some risk (3)** for 28.6% of those surveyed, while junk cars ranked as **little risk (2)**.

Vector (mosquito) and animal control factors were ranked as **high risk (4)**, vector control, for 36.1% of surveyed population, and **little to some risk** for animal control in 28.6% of those surveyed.

Residents believed that **water use** was of **little risk (2)** to the environmental health, as was **land use** (48.2%).

Use of chemicals, such as pesticides was asked about in the survey, and half of those surveyed (50.0%) categorized it as **little risk (2)**, the next level marked was **some risk (3)** for 32.3%.

Health Conditions

In the survey questionnaire, 36 different health conditions/diagnoses were listed for the individual to mark. Participants were instructed to check all conditions that apply to themselves. Conditions included diabetes, high cholesterol, cancer, eye disorders, dental problems, respiratory disease, etc. The top five conditions/diagnoses chosen by surveyed Prairie County residents were:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| ➤ High Blood Pressure | 37.1% |
| ➤ High Cholesterol | 28.6% |
| ➤ Arthritis | 28.6% |
| ➤ Eye Disorders | 24.3% |
| ➤ Hearing disorders/loss | 20.0% |

Demographics

It is important to take into consideration the demographics of this population, in which considerable effort was made when obtaining sampled residents, to capture a variety of people demographically to represent the community.

Of the sampled residents who completed the survey:

Place of Residence

Terry	58.6%	Rural	32.9%	Fallon	5.7%
-------	-------	-------	-------	--------	------

Age Range

65+ years	52.2%	55-64 yrs	22.4%	25-44 yrs	13.4%
45-54 yrs	11.9%	18-24 yrs	0%		

Ethnic Group

White/Caucasian	92.9%	Hispanic/Latino	1.4%	Native American	0%
African American	0%	Asian/Pacific Islander	0%		

Level of Education

College degree or higher	47.1%	H.S. diploma or GED	35.7%
Less than H.S.	7.1%		

Summary of Key Findings and Priority Areas

After careful reflection of the data, along with analyzing the opportunities and assets available in this community, key findings and priority areas were brought to the forefront. One top key finding was the community's desire to have an outpatient physical therapy/rehabilitation service available in Terry. Prairie Community Hospital has been proactive in bringing this service to the area over the last year, and it has proven to be a service that is in high demand for this community.

Another key finding were the health care services that people seek in another community that are also offered here in Terry. Community members may not be aware that their labs and x-rays can get sent to their provider in a timely manner, so they do not have to make an extra trip to their provider for a support service that is already offered here. In addition, there is an experienced lab technician on site to provide quality laboratory services for this rural area. The local hospital district is scheduled to improve structural aspects to the clinic to provide better privacy, and x-ray equipment is also getting upgraded.

Alcohol and drug abuse were found to be the most important risky behaviors in Prairie County, followed by being overweight. There are numerous outreach programs available through the state health department to aide people in overcoming these problems (eg. Tobacco Quit Line). Resources can be obtained through the local public health department, as well as the Prairie County Clinic.

Priority areas looked to be educating the public regarding the services and resources that are available in Terry, promoting those services and other community assets, and bringing in experts to educate

community members on certain diseases or other issues that impact their quality of life. For instance, in addition to advertising, and social media postings, the hospital is looking into hosting an open house which will spotlight the P.T. program, as well as the lab and x-ray departments. Community outreach education programs can be developed to promote access to the community center exercise equipment, the swimming pool, and the local park. Public educational programs such as a diabetes education program, caregiver education program, etc. are also valuable aspects that can empower individuals and improve their well-being.

In conclusion, it was found that the aging population as well as people of young and median age in Prairie County would benefit from the variety of existing community assets, services, and resources to address their concerns of health and well-being. Promoting those services and resources and finding ways to attract continued interest in these services is the challenge that lies ahead.

Community Resources

- The following community resources have been identified as organizations that have the ability to improve the health and overall well-being of Prairie County residents as a whole, considering the populations at-risk and other resident groups that are vulnerable to a diminished healthy lifestyle:
 - Prairie County Clinic
 - Prairie Community Hospital
 - Council on Aging
 - Prairie County Public Health Department
 - Prairie County Board of Health
 - Meals on Wheels Program
 - Prairie Community/Senior Center