

Building a culture of health

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There is widespread acknowledgment that improving health in our community, not to mention bending the unsustainable curve of health care cost growth, will necessitate greater attention to social determinants of health and other factors extending beyond the walls of medical clinics and hospitals.

A healthy community is not merely a product of expanded health insurance coverage and the elimination of barriers to accessing health care when care is needed. It is one broadly shaped by the availability of affordable housing, decent jobs paying a livable wage, and quality educational opportunities – that is to say, fundamental conditions of social and economic of life conducive to good health and well-being in the first place.

We also know that the social and built environment of a healthy community – abundant parks and green spaces, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks and bike lanes, widespread availability of grocery stores stocked with fresh food and nutritious options – is one that makes healthy behaviors the easiest choice.

Building a culture of health means recognizing that while our economic, geographic, or social circumstances may differ, each of us aspire to lead the healthiest lives that we can. A culture of health thus requires a pursuit of innovative, broad-based collaboration among diverse public and private organizations who share the common goal of a healthier community.

Fortunately, this type of collaborative work is already underway in our community. Early this year, the Washoe County Health District and local health care leaders spearheaded the inaugural Truckee Meadows Healthy Communities conference and conversation.

This event has spurred targeted efforts to tackle poor health indicators associated with poverty, poor housing conditions, and lack of employment opportunities in high-need zip codes of our community, including the 89502 community health improvement project. The healthy communities conversation has also resulted in major grant funding for a three-year project addressing food insecurity and other social determinants of health in the Truckee Meadows being led by the Food Bank of Northern Nevada.

More recently, over 100 individuals representing local government health and human service agencies, non-profit and philanthropic organizations, hospitals and medical providers, and educators met over breakfast to take stock of successes in 2015 and to explore steps needed to sustain the momentum of collaborative activities as we look toward the future.

One of the hallmarks of the healthy communities conversation currently underway in the Truckee Meadows has been the way in which diverse organizations and leaders have come together to harness the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to implement a culture of health in our community.

The potential of this this conversation and building an enduring culture of health is both simple and radical in concept. Simple because it's essentially a gathering of leaders and organizations willing to move beyond their own walls today in order to learn with and from each other in pursuit of the shared prospect of a healthier Truckee Meadows community tomorrow.

For more information on the Truckee Meadows Health Communities Conversation and how you can join efforts to build a culture of health, visit www.truckeemeadowshappycommunities.com.

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