



**Community Progress Network's Health Roundtable:
*My Health. My Voice. A community conversation about being
healthy in Arlington***
Thursday, November 1, 2018
Summary



The Community Progress Network (CPN) is a coalition of Arlingtonians committed to advancing our community's vision of inclusivity and diversity. Comprised of more than 30 non-profit, government and civic leaders, CPN works to engage, educate and advocate for equitable programs, policies, and investments in Arlington. Recognizing that the voices of low-income Arlingtonians often go unheard, CPN launched a series of facilitated roundtable discussions focused on key service areas essential to every individual and family. The CPN Roundtables provide an opportunity for community residents to share challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening services and supports. The second of four roundtables took place on November 1, 2018 at Wakefield High School in Arlington, focused on the theme, *My Health. My Voice. A community conversation about health in Arlington.*

Arlington County Public Health Division in partnership with community organizations launched **Destination 2027** campaign to improve health equity through systems change by 2027. Destination 2027 uses feedback from community members, data about health in our community, and information about how well our local public health system is meeting national standards to identify how the Public Health Division can work with, and empower, Arlington residents and community-based organizations to improve public health.

Defining health incorporates physical, mental and social well-being with six external factors that can impact your health either positively and/or negatively. These factors include: healthcare, social connections, neighborhoods, environment, education, and economy. This roundtable conversation aimed to gather feedback from participants regarding the people, places, and things that facilitated positive health and identify barriers to well-being.

Removing barriers to participation and creating a welcoming environment for 128 participants was a key priority. Volunteers included translators to support the full participation of Spanish, Arabic, Amharic, Mongolian and English speakers, and childcare was provided. 16 small group tables were organized by language spoken, with a conversation facilitator, notetaker, and, as needed, translator. One table was for teens aged 13-18.

The evening kicked off with a family style dinner allowing participants and table volunteers to get acquainted and build trust to encourage more open conversation. After introductions, facilitators led participants at each table in a discussion about what motivated them to come out to this discussion on health. A second round of discussion explored what gets in their way of being as healthy as they want to be. The third round focused on the people, places or things in their neighborhood that helps them be healthy. . Each round of table discussion was followed by a full-room "harvest" time to uncover emerging common concerns and cross cutting issues. After the concerns were noted, the final round ended the discussion on a positive note with a listing of the things that are working well for participants.

Notetakers at each table recorded closely the comments and concerns of participants. CPN will publish the full report as well as all table notes on its website, www.communityprogressnetwork.org.

The attached report is organized by six factors that can impact health, either positively or negatively. These include Healthcare, Environment, Social Connections, Neighborhoods, Environment, and Economy.

I'm a substance abuse counselor. And I will say that in my opinion the biggest mistake that people can make with addicts is they just treat the substance abuse, but they miss all the underlying health issues that can go with it – diabetes, chemical imbalances, mental health or depression issues that people are self-medicating. It's a whole health issue, not just a substance abuse issue.

Healthcare

Overall, participants in the roundtable were concerned about their ability to consistently access quality health care when needed. Lack of insurance limited access to affordable healthcare and services are causing hardship for low-income residents of Arlington, as well as barriers due to language, time, and difficulties understanding the system. Participants discussed challenges in simply making appointments for a variety of reasons, such as scheduling not speaking their language, long wait times, and appointment only during working hours. This often led to frustration and simply giving up on pursuing medical care requiring appointments. Additionally, those that do not qualify for Medicaid and other government programs, they use home remedies and avoid seeking formal care when possible. When they feel they cannot avoid medical care, they often use the emergency room services. This puts them in a cycle of debt as often they cannot afford the hospital bill and are out of work during recovery, which can have impacts on other areas of their lives, such as having a car impounded. Even those who have good health insurance can still experience challenges in access due to language barriers and transportation. Another major concern is the lack of transparency of costs associated with medical care. Participants cited that they are often surprised by the bills they receive, which may cause them to avoid medical treatment in the future. There was frustration in not being able to get reliable information about the cost of treatments before receiving treatments, so they would be able to make a more informed decision about treatment. Participants also expressed the lack of mental health services and access available; as well as it's disconnected from other health and social services.

I got voicemails from my doctor's office and they are all in English and they speak too fast for me to understand them. And so, then I go in the doctor's office and I find my appointment was canceled because they said I didn't call back when I was supposed to. Or sometimes I misunderstood the day because I can't understand the messages. I call back but it's hard to get my questions answered because the receptionist doesn't speak Spanish and can't understand me.

Social Connections

Participants expressed the importance of multicultural events, community centers, and programs to help bring family and friends together. However, language barriers, lack of free time and limited access to internet connections were identified as challenges for some across the community. Faith and cultural communities were cited several times as being sources of support and resources, even if the participants were not formal members of these organizations. Many participants learn about programs through those faith and cultural communities. Other support groups included nonprofits such as AFAC, APAH, AHC and ASPAN. AFAC was repeatedly mentioned as a huge assistance in helping participants acquire healthy foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. County programs and departments such as emergency services, libraries, farmers markets and senior programming were also mentioned as providing support services. Some noted that there should be a greater effort to distribute information, particularly about the variety of programs (both county sponsored and nonprofit) that do exist in Arlington. Ideas included email list serves and big information boards in

multiple languages, to help ensure a variety of people were able to get the information, rather than needing to rely on a specific connection to learn about programs. Participants noted the importance of their social connections in building support networks that help to enhance their overall well-being, by reducing isolation, support in crisis, and people to motivate them to be healthier. The importance of social connections also tied into people's concerns about rising costs in Arlington, as they want to be able to maintain these connections going forward.

The people at my church have been such a godsend to me. They go online and print out forms for getting food coupons for me and they help fill them out. And now I can use these coupons at the local farmers markets to get myself fruit and vegetables! I just love kale – but I could never afford to buy it before. I don't know where I'd be without them helping me

Neighborhood

While participants expressed that Arlington does have better housing programs compared to surrounding areas, they still feel that housing stability is a concern. Although, despite the rising cost of housing, most people indicated that they feel safe in their own neighborhoods and are willing to pay more to stay in Arlington. There were also concerns about the balance between car, bike, and pedestrian safety, particularly at night and for those with disabilities. This was also discussed as a barrier to people going out into the community to walk for exercise. Participants believe that Arlington is lacking in affordable healthy grocery stores that provide fresh produce. There was concern about lower cost options, such as the Food Star, leaving Arlington and being replaced by more expensive stores. This results in participants needing to travel further to access groceries they feel they can afford. Public transportation in Arlington is used regularly by participants. They find the diverse options of buses, trains, bike share and pedestrian trails useful.

I know a woman in my neighborhood, and after her husband died, she got completely isolated. She wouldn't go out at all. And ultimately the neighbors had to go to her and ask her if there was anything she needed – any trips she needed made, or food shopping, or picking up drugs. She was completely going without care because she was so isolated

Environment

Participants were generally grateful for the public parks and community centers that are present across Arlington County. While participants enjoy the availability of public parks and community centers, they expressed concern that the lack of maintenance and security make them less desirable to use. Particularly, some parks feel very isolated and unsafe to use after dark. Some did note that when there were increased police presence in the past, they felt more secure in the parks at night. There was also a perception that there are not enough low cost or free gyms in all neighborhoods for participants to easily access to be able to exercise. Amenities such as playgrounds, pools, gyms, and indoor play areas for children are overcrowded and scarce in

Arlington is great for walking. I live near Columbia Pike and I walk a lot. Columbia Pike is my playground. I would like to walk to Virginia Square to meet my brother, who lives there. But I don't know that place, so I am scared.

some neighborhoods. Another concern regarding the environment is pollution in the area caused by automobiles and litter.

Education

While participants identified excellent quality in Arlington Public Schools, there was a desire for more opportunities to access school resources and supports, addressing language barriers and offering mental health supports for students. In addition, participants expressed interest for easier access to after school activities and adult education programs. Schools are a source for information on other programs, including health care services, but distribution of this information can be uneven depending on an individual's preference for how to receive information (written, electronic, etc). Others said the health clinics and bilingual family resource assistants at schools are very useful, helping them learn about other programs in the community and providing guidance for further action. Many noted that the healthier food options schools give are seen as "disgusting" by children, and so they are not eating them. There was a sense that there needs to be more done in schools to assist students with mental health. Counselors seem overworked, and there is not enough emphasis on helping the students learn how to deal with stress and balancing school and other issues. The increase in "peace rooms" at schools were noted as a step in the right direction, particularly by the teen table. For adults, there was a feeling that there are not enough affordable ESL programs, or information about how to access fee reductions and/or scholarships.

School communities - teachers, staff, school nurses, and families - help bring comfort to our daily lives. The school nurse at Hoffman-Boston, who is also Mongolian, made the whole paperwork process of school easier to navigate and complete.

Economy

Participants shared their challenges in balancing the costs of healthcare, housing, transportation and food costs. The costs of housing, and concern about being able to continue to live in Arlington with the rising costs, was a very large concern for participants. The amount of income spent on rent also made participants concerned about being able to afford rent if an emergency cost, particularly a medical bill, came up. Another major obstacle that participants brought up included the convenience of unhealthy fast-food options in comparison to costly, time-consuming meal preparation of healthy foods. Many express that when it comes between affording childcare or health insurance, they select the first, this was an especially big concern for those working longer hours. These trade-offs become increasingly difficult for families with only one income or those in low-wage jobs. Repeatedly, participants expressed the difficult choice of paying rent, buying food, childcare or paying medical bills without assistance from programs or family. The reliance on family was noted for those who fall just above the levels to receive assistance from government agencies but struggle to stay afloat month to month due to high living expenses in the area. Participants did note that having free food such as that provided by AFAC, and cost reductions given by schools and county programs, were imperative in allowing them to make healthier choices in their lives.

I needed to go for an ultra sound, but I have no insurance and there's no way you can afford a procedure like that without insurance. So, what can I do? I just had to wait and hope that Medicare will come and help me some day.

**Community Progress Network's Health Roundtable:
*My Health. My Voice. A community conversation about being
healthy in Arlington***

**Thursday, November 1, 2018 @ 5:30-8:30pm
Residents Comments**



Participant Comments

Below is an attempt to find common themes from what was recorded, just because a point only came up once does not mean it is unimportant or unique to one person. There was not enough time for every participant to detail every issue they had encountered. The following coding tables are only intended to give a high-level understanding of the concerns the participants had. In the appendix are the complete and more detailed notes from which these codings are derived. You should read both. Note: Each comment could be coded multiple times.

What are the challenges / barriers to becoming healthier?

1. Healthcare:

ACA is crippled	1
Embarrassment	1
Medication side effects	1
Need for holistic health care	1
Nervous at Doctor's Office	1
No information on prevention care	1
Rehabilitation Programs too short	1
Teen clinic stigmatized	1
Trust	1
Cultural Knowledge of Physicians	2
Difficult to remember to take meds	2
Length of time it takes to get an appointment	2
Sleep	2
Discrimination (Racial, Cultural, Religious)	3
Healthcare system overburdened by number of patients	3
Pre/ Post-natal care options limited	3
Cost of exams, xrays, tests, etc	4
Untreated existing conditions	4
Lack of communication between health and service providers	6
Cost of Medication	7
Disconnect between paper work provided and what's required	7
Appointment timing	8
Excessive paperwork	8
Lack of positive social interaction with Doctor's office and Staff	8
Mental Health Care	9
Motivation for exercise	9
Dentistry coverage	10
Language	10
Lines	10
Lack of information about services	21
Lack of access to affordable healthcare	54

Total 201

Language and Discrimination are included with healthcare because they were most frequently discussed in the context of being barriers to receiving care at the doctor's office.

2. Social Connections / Society:

Depression	1
Gender divide over exercise	1
No time to self	1
Stigmatization of mental illness	3

Caseworker training and sensitivity	4
Social Isolation	7
Total	17

3. Neighborhood / Local Government:

Lack of advertisement of county fitness centers	1
Walk signs are too fast	1
Crime rates	3
Loss of Community	4
Park Safety	4
Traffic	5
Access to fitness equipment	6
Drug abuse	6
Safety at night	6
Safe place for exercise	12
Transportation (too many transfers, difficult access)	12
Total	60

4. Environment / Technology:

Media and Technology	1
Digital Divide	2
Pollution	3
Total	6

5. Education/Schools:

Activities for children with special needs	1
Lack of discussion in schools over social issues	1
School counselors inaccessible	1
Technology in school not helpful	1
Education lacking around Mental Illness	2
School food	5
Total	11

6. Economy / Federal Government:

Citizenship	1
Financial Strain	1
Food processing is different, caused weight gain	1
No credit	1
Farmer's Markets too Expensive	2
Job opportunities	2
Access to affordable grocery stores (Aldi, Grandmart, Food star)	3
Access to healthy food	3
Political Atmosphere	3
Too much food choice (unhealthy)	4
Stress	9
Cost of Food	10
Missing Access to Affordable housing	10
Cost management of staying healthy (time and money)	17
Total	67

What helps keep you Healthy?

1. Healthcare

Arlington Pediatric Center	1
Healthcare for children	1
Kaiser	1
Substance Abuse Recovery Programs	1
Women's Clinic	1
Health Insurance	2
Mental Health Care	2
Free Clinic	6
Exercise	7
Total	22

2. Social Connections/Society

Charity	1
Spanish speaking customer service	1
Student tutors	1
Translators	2
Families	5
Friends	5
Faith Organizations	6
Social Workers	7
Community	16
Total	44

3. Neighborhood/Local Government

Accessibility	1
Activities centered on Kids	1
APAH	1
B2I	1
Gym memberships for children	1
Police Presence	1
Project Family	1
Salvation Army	1
The Sequoia Building	1
Therapeutic Recreation Program	1
Arlington fitness classes	2
A-SPAN	2
Cultural Community Centers	2
Fire / Police Response Speeds	2
AHC	3
Arlington Vibrancy	4
Libraries / Community Centers	4
Preserving Communities	4
Affordable Community Gym Memberships	7
DHS	7
Transportation (many options, easy use)	7
AFAC	9

Neighborhood Safety	10
Parks and Recreation	26
Total	99

4. Environment/Technology

ARLnow	1
Internet	1
Total	2

5. Education/Schools

Adult Continuing Education Opportunities	1
Crossing Guards	1
Extension Services	1
Montessori	1
Peer Centers	1
Economics/personal finance class	2
School Peace Rooms	2
Health education at schools	3
Afterschool Programs	4
School Counselors	4
Quality of Schools	11
Total	31

6. Economy/Federal Government

SNAP	1
Farmer's Market affordable healthy food	2
WIC	2
Affordable Housing	4
Food Availability / Variety	4
Food Banks	9
Total	22

What's on your Wishlist that would help with staying healthy?

1. Healthcare

Better communication between agencies	1
Encourage kids to go to doctors on their own	1
List of Doctors who take Medicaid and Medicare	1
More Health Fairs	1
Single stream healthcare services	1
Translators to help	1
Holistic treatments	2
Make health care service more human and kinder	3
More communication about offered services	3
Make Insurance policies easier to understand	4
Mental Health Resources	4
Dental care	5
Access to affordable or free health care	20
Total	47

2. Social Connections/ Society		
Protection for at risk populations (LGBTQ, minorities, etc.)	1	
Community inclusion in county decision making	1	
Community Building events	3	
Peace on Earth	5	
	Total	10
3. Neighborhood / Local Government		
More parks	1	
Transportation for kids to activities	1	
Guidance on navigating the social safety net	2	
Better infrastructure	6	
	Total	10
4. Environment / Technology		
Environmental Efforts	1	
Park upkeep	2	
	Total	3
5. Education / Schools		
Additional ESL programs	1	
Adult education on mental health	1	
Better support for kids from single parent households	1	
Computer Classes	1	
Counseling Resources	1	
Counselors follow class from k-12	1	
Doctors at schools	1	
Education on healthcare and taxes at a younger age	1	
Health Education for children	1	
Match counselors based on gender	1	
More frequent check-ins with school counselors	1	
School based mental health resources	1	
English language learning	3	
Expanding after school programs	4	
	Total	19
6. Economy / Federal Government		
Access to affordable child care	1	
Affordable grocery stores	1	
Affordable healthy food	1	
Authorization to work in the USA	1	
Credit Repair	1	
Gun Control	1	
Job training	1	
Money	1	
More high paying job opportunities	1	
Job opportunities	3	
Time	6	
Affordable Access to fitness equipment	8	
Affordable housing	8	
	Total	34