



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Community Health Improvement Plan Southwestern District Health Unit

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On February 24, 2012, the Community Partners in Southwestern North Dakota met together to evaluate the Region VIII Community Health Assessment (2011) and the Southwest District Community Health Profile Data Tables that were put together. The purpose of the meeting was to come up with priorities of areas that need improvement and areas to work on.

In order to address the needs of the region, the following steps should be taken:

- **Assessing needs and resources**
- **Pick priorities**
- **Find programs and policies that will successfully work in implementing these goals**
- **Implement strategies to address these needs**
- **Evaluate the efforts**

The major issue that the Community Partners found was problems associated with the oil boom in western North Dakota. Housing, emotional health, violence, crime and availability of services were among the priorities the Partners found.

There are 10 areas that are considered priorities:

1. Housing issues
2. Workforce shortage
3. Emotional health

4. Substance abuse
5. Emergency services availability
6. Crime
7. Family violence
8. Injury
9. Access to health care
10. Sexual behavior

Based on the priorities and based on what the region is able to accomplish as a group, the Community Partners determined that the component that would be focused on first would be the **emotional health** of those assisting the community (i.e. emergency workers, educators, health professionals, EMS, etc.). The goal is to find ways and develop resources, references, training, and ways to cope with the increased needs that are associated with the oil impacts.

The biggest priority is to provide those that serve the population with ways of coping with the continuing changes that are happening. A few examples of ways to deal with this would be to find ways to relieve stress and give employers resources and references to deal with these issues.

The first part will be reaching out to the Southwestern District Health Unit staff and determine the needs they face. Second, the Community Partners determined they would reach out to the community that is dealing with the same priority issues listed above. All priority issues (i.e. housing, workforce shortages, crime,

availability, access, injury, crime/violence, substance abuse, and sexual behavior) are all related to the emotional health.

The primary group that has focused on these issues has been the Southwest Disaster Mental Health/Special Needs Coalition. The Southwest Disaster Mental Health/Special Needs Coalition has been meeting monthly to establish tools and resources and aid the employers with their needs. The coalition is also trying to recruit new members and increase involvement. Among these new members are retired school teachers, retired school counselors, members of the clergy, and many others.

Current members of the Southwest Disaster Mental Health/Special Needs Coalition consists of the Badlands Human Services, mental health professionals, members of the clergy, social workers, public health, emergency management, school counselors and teachers, and agencies that support those with special needs (such as ABLE).

PRIMARY ISSUE: Emotional Health

As stated above, the emotional health of the communities and region are the primary focus. If the emotional health is strong, the region is better able to deal with the other primary issues affecting the southwestern counties of North Dakota. Again, all priority issues (i.e. housing, workforce shortages, crime, availability, access, injury, crime/violence, substance abuse, and sexual behavior) are all related to emotional health.

According to a study released by Northwestern National Life and the CDC, 40 percent of American workers report feeling “extremely” stressed while at work and one out of four Americans say their job is the number one source of stress in their lives. The CDC reported that problems and stress at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than any other life stressor,



even more than financial problems or family issues. In addition, stress can lead to productivity issues and distractions. With most employers struggling to fill all the positions needed to complete everyday tasks in the workplace, additional stress can lead to an even more demanding work environment.

The CDC listed three types of stress: day-to-day stress, cumulative stress, and critical incident stress. Day-to-day stress is the most common type and

refers to stress from one's personal life, family, or social setting. Cumulative stress is stress caused by various stresses at one's job. Critical incident stress is most common among first responders when dealing with extreme, traumatic or chaotic events.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

The first step in coping with stress is making sure each individual is in the best possible condition both physically and emotionally. Finding time to regularly exercise can dramatically reduce stress and increase physical health. One suggestion by the CDC is to start workplace exercise regiments or challenges. Participating as a team in community marathons, setting up an exercise “point system” to reward regular physical activity, or gym memberships are just a few suggestions. Good physical shape dramatically reduces stress. Healthy eating habits will also maintain proper physical health and reduce stress.

Emotional health is also key in lowering stress. There are a variety of ways to deal with the emotional health in the workplace. For instance, relaxation exercises and stress management are ways to cope with stress. Communication is a key part of stress management. Encourage staff and employees to regularly discuss stress with management.

For management, the CDC recommends looking at the organizational structure of the workplace and determine that if there are changes needed:

- Determine if workload is in line with workers’ capabilities and resources
- Clearly define workers’ roles and responsibilities
- Give workers the opportunity to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs
- Improve communications between workers and management. This helps reduce uncertainty about career development and security.

- Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees
- Examine work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities

Note: Implementing these strategies should be done incrementally and should reflect each job's needs. For instance, for emergency responders, implement stress management techniques in all phases of the response (pre-deployment, in the field, and at the end of the response).

There are three primary health centers in southwestern North Dakota. Each of these centers equipped to handle and coordinate the mental health of the communities.



Stress management cannot be successfully achieved by managers and employers alone. Each individual employee must make personal changes to help maintain a healthy lifestyle and improve workplace performance. Below are a few suggestions to help employees achieve this goal:

- Stay proactive in stress management. When the signs of stress first begin, take appropriate action to address that stress before it becomes worse.
- Make a deliberate attempt in identifying stress.
- Know your limits. Exceeding your limits will impact your work and will not only result in poor performance but will likely increase your stress and harm your personal emotional and physical health.
- Communication is key. Ask for help when you need it. This applies to both your work but also personal support.
- Improve your dietary habits. Eat healthy foods whenever possible and try to maintain a healthy physical lifestyle. Cutting back on junk foods, sugary drinks and caffeine will help keep your body and mind focused. Cut down on alcohol consumption and tobacco usage.



- Exercise regularly. Keeping your body in order will greatly improve your work and reduce stress.
- Get on a regular schedule, if possible. Wake up at the same time and go to sleep at the same hour. Maintaining regular sleeping hours makes sure you are well rested and focused during the day.



- Each day, find time to do something that helps you relax. Examples include listening to music, exercising, reading, writing, meditating, or cooking.

These methods of coping with stress can be achieved both individually and as a group.

CONCLUSION

There are many primary health issues affecting the region. In order to fully address these issues properly and effectively, the emotional health of the staff is key. For management, maintaining open communication with staff is vital in understanding the needs of employees. Management should promote healthy habits for staff members. For employees, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and following proper stress relieving techniques will greatly reduce stress and increase work performance.

