

Southwestern Vermont Health Care Community Health Needs Assessment Annual Implementation Report Update 2023

Southwestern Vermont Health Care

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Executive Summary

In 2021, Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC) identified the priority health needs of the 75,000 individuals living within its service area:



The need across all four priority needs was greatest within youth and young adults (age 13-34). Across all data sources, this age group indicated challenges with meeting basic needs, such as access to safe and affordable housing, addressing a high rate of psychological distress and mental health challenges, tackling struggles with substance use and addiction, overcoming prevalent barriers to healthy behaviors, and accessing affordable health care.

The strategies contained within this implementation plan simultaneously impact multiple health priorities in recognition of the overlapping nature of the priority health needs. For example, free transitional care nursing makes quality care more convenient and affordable while encouraging healthy behaviors and primary prevention. Similarly, the Healthy+ magazine publishes articles on mental health supports as well as substance use harm reduction strategies and recovery resources.

This implementation plan has been built upon SVMC's framework for organizing community health initiatives, which links the physical and financial environment with healthy behavior choice to drive health outcomes. SVMC's efforts are broad and multifaceted. A comprehensive description of each initiative is beyond the scope of this report. Rather this report attempts to show how SVMC's diverse initiatives are organized into a coordinated plan. Changes to the specific activities will be made based upon effectiveness of the effort, budgetary constraints, and evolving community partnerships.

Priority Health Needs

The Community Health Needs Assessment of SVMC's service area identified 4 priority health needs.



1. Mental Health Supports

Mental health conditions were consistently identified as a top concern in all methods used to gather community insight and data. Depression and anxiety impact large portions of the SVMC service population, particularly among youth and young adults. More than 80% of individuals aged 13-34 experienced some level of challenge with depression or anxiety. Mental health challenges can critically affect the ability to make healthy behavior choices, to financially support oneself, and to enjoy and thrive in life.

2. Promotion of Healthy Behaviors and Primary Prevention Activities

An individual's behaviors, habits, and choices can influence their health outcomes. Over time, certain behaviors, such as tobacco and drug use, physical inactivity, and a poor diet can negatively affect overall well-being, resulting in chronic conditions and early mortality. Individuals within SVMC's service area face significant challenges with consistently performing healthy behaviors and developing healthy habits, particularly with regards to maintaining physical activity. SVMC understands that making healthy behavior choices is not always easy or possible, given environmental, financial, and other constraints. Influence over behavior cannot be accomplished solely through education and repetitive lecturing from industry leaders. Instead, community- and system-level barriers to health should be addressed before individual level change can be achieved.

3. Accessibility of High-Quality, Convenient, and Affordable Care

Intrinsic to SVMC's commitment to the community is the provision of exceptional care. Ensuring access to high quality care is at the heart of the hospital's mission, and is reflected in its strategic plan and community health efforts. Connection to the health system is essential for maintenance of good health, early detection of illness, and the connection of individuals to necessary resources and supports, even though much of individual health outcomes are determined outside of the clinical setting. A number of barriers to the receipt of care were identified during the CHNA process, including challenges securing fast and convenient appointments, particularly for primary care, and the high cost of health care.

4. Substance Use Prevention, Harm Reduction, Treatment, and Recovery Resources

Substance use has had a wide-ranging impact on the health of individuals in SVMC's service area. Many aged 13-24 have indicated a personal struggle with substance use disorder. Opioid use is resulting in an increasing number of fatal and non-fatal overdoses. Binge drinking and the use of tobacco, particularly electronic vaping among youth, are both alarmingly prevalent within the community. There is no single intervention able to alleviate the suffering and reduce the mortality caused by substance use. However, harm reduction programming and support for those currently struggling with substance use disorder, including those who are not yet able to take steps towards treatment and recovery, remain essential. The availability of treatment resources, whether medication, counseling, or other treatment means, is a critical component of the substance use recovery process. Finally, access to and stability of long-term resources, including housing, support groups, and sufficient employment, remain crucial for the maintenance of sustained recovery.

Implementation Plan and Community Health Initiatives Framework

Each of the identified priority health needs warrants careful use of dedicated resources to affect positive change. Nearly all of the strategies listed will impact multiple priorities. For instance, providing support for Early Intervention to identify children with physical or neurological challenges that hamper speech, mobility, or learning makes high quality care more convenient and affordable (health priority #1) while encouraging healthy behaviors and primary prevention (health priority #2) and supports mental health (health priority #3). While this plan is a general guide for impacting the priority health needs identified, it is a living document. Changes to the specific activities will be made based upon effectiveness of the effort, budgetary constraints, and evolving community partnerships.

Fiscal Year 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment Implementation Plan

Program or initiative	Priority Health Need			
	1. Mental Health Supports	2. Healthy Behaviors / Primary Prevention	3. High-quality Care	4. Substance Use Prevention and Treatment
Clinical-Related Efforts				
Universal screening for mental health concerns	✓		✓	✓
Intensive outpatient program for children & adolescents plan	✓		✓	✓
Adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit plan	✓		✓	✓
Community screenings for chronic disease and cancer		✓	✓	
Transitional Care Nursing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support for Bennington Free Clinic		✓	✓	
Diabetes Care Education Program		✓	✓	
Primary care provider recruitment and subsidization	✓	✓	✓	✓
Free and subsidized care			✓	
Support for Early Intervention	✓	✓		
Community Initiatives				
Woebot- AI driven mental wellness app for adolescents	✓	✓		✓
Healthy+, SVMC's quarterly health tips magazine	✓	✓	✓	✓
Population Health Internship Program		✓		
Messages for Me- texting platform for folks in recovery	✓	✓		✓
Putnam Downtown Redevelopment project investment				
AmeriCorps VISTA Fellows support	✓	✓		✓
SVMC walking trail maintenance and upgrades		✓		
Community health education initiatives	✓	✓		✓
Community events sponsorships		✓		
Participation on community organization's boards	✓			✓

The implementation plan has been built upon SVMC's framework for organizing community health initiatives, shown below. Health outcomes, including mortality and disease burden, are at the top of this framework. While influential health behaviors are the overarching drivers of health outcomes, these behaviors are tempered by mental health and systemic and personal factors outside of an individual's control. Influential health behaviors are supported by 5 pillars: physical environment, social environment, education, nutrition, and health care, which influence the ability to practice and sustain healthy behaviors. These pillars are grounded in a foundation of personal finance, recognizing that individual income, expenses, and debt control the ability to manifest and capitalize on opportunities of health and personal success. Underpinning the entire framework is the region's economic status which, as demonstrated by a large body of literature, recognizes that place (ex. zip code) is a strong and consistent driver of individual and community health outcomes.



In order to address the priority health needs identified by the community health needs assessment, SVMC must take a broad and multifaceted approach. A comprehensive description of each established and planned initiative is beyond the scope of this report, rather this report attempts to demonstrate how SVMC's initiatives are organized into the coordinated framework above (see grid below). Alignment of the initiatives with the community efforts organizational framework will yield strong impact across the drivers of health outcomes.

Fiscal Year 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment Implementation Plan

Program or initiative	Community Health Initiatives Framework								
	Healthy Behaviors	Physical Environment	Social Environment	Education	Nutrition	Health Care	Personal Finances	Regional Economics	
Clinical-Related Efforts									
Universal screening for mental health concerns			✓			✓			
Intensive outpatient program for children & adolescents plan		✓				✓		✓	
Adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit plan		✓				✓		✓	
Community screenings for chronic disease and cancer	✓			✓	✓	✓			
Transitional Care Nursing	✓		✓		✓	✓			
Support for Bennington Free Clinic						✓			
Diabetes Care Education Program	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
Primary care provider recruitment and subsidization	✓				✓	✓			
Free and subsidized care		✓				✓	✓	✓	
Support for Early Intervention	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Community Initiatives									
Woebot- AI driven mental wellness app for adolescents	✓		✓	✓					
Healthy+, SVMC's quarterly health tips magazine	✓		✓	✓		✓			
Population Health Internship Program	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Messages for Me- texting platform for folks in recovery	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Putnam Downtown Redevelopment project investment		✓						✓	
AmeriCorps VISTA Fellows support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
SVMC walking trail maintenance and upgrades	✓	✓						✓	
Community health education initiatives	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Community events sponsorships	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
Participation on community organization's boards	✓			✓				✓	

Report Dissemination

The report will be made available to the public as a PDF file from the SVMC's web page (<http://svhealthcare.org>, as 2023 implementation report update). Members of the public can also request a print copy of this report by contacting James Trimarchi via e-mail (james.trimarchi@svhealthcare.org) or phone (802.440.4051).