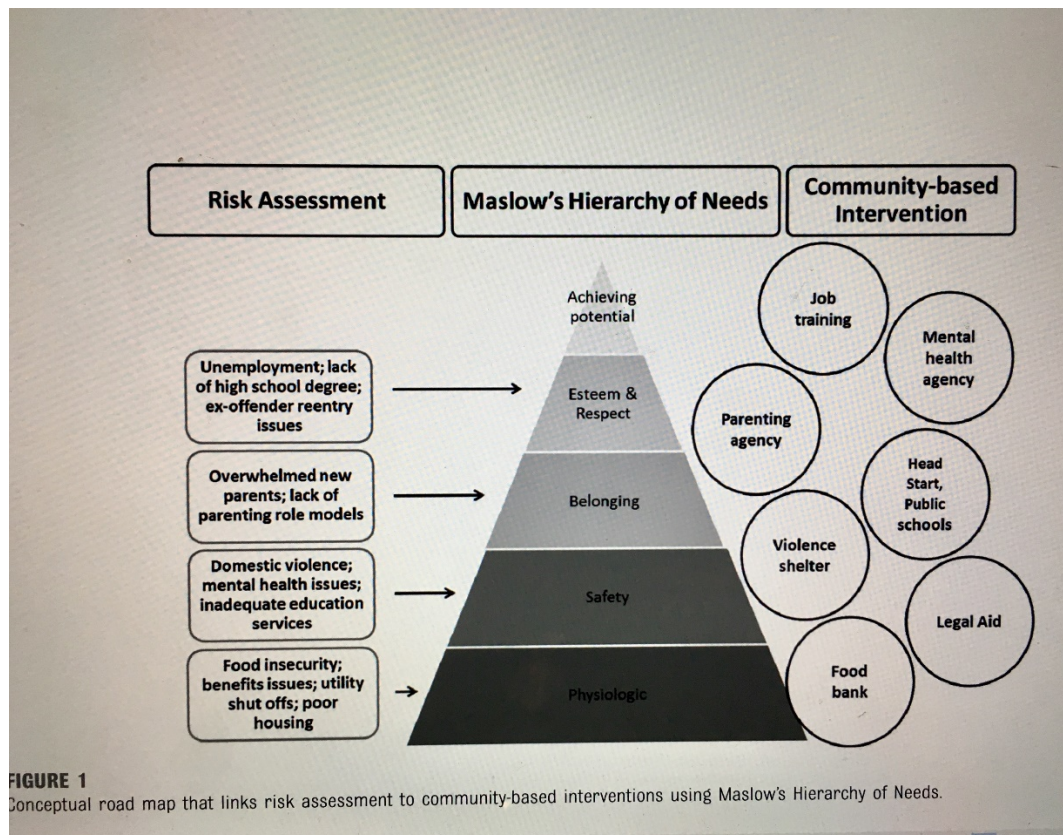


INTERIM HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY RELATED TO HEALTH CARE DELIVERY STUDY
“Community Based Services Example”

Chairman Keiser and Committee Members. I am Janell Regimbal, Vice President of Children’s Services at Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. On behalf of Lutheran Social Services, I am providing testimony today, sharing about an effective example of an evidenced based program addressing health drivers.

Social determinants of health have been well-established in studies and in academic circles. Yet what may be hidden are examples of service delivery methods and programs that help address a variety of these determinants. It is far easier to identify a single barrier such as transportation and how to address that particular barrier, than perhaps it is to see a multi-faceted approach that can deliver a myriad of positive outcomes.



I would like to share with you the example of the Healthy Families America (HFA) model of home visiting- a method of delivering services to families that addresses so many issues we know to be important. The Healthy Families model of home visiting is rooted in the belief that early, nurturing relationships are the foundation for life long, healthy development. Interactions between Family Support Specialists and families are designed to promote positive parent-child relationships and healthy attachments through strength-based, family-centered, culturally sensitive and reflective practices. The program is specifically designed to support parents who may have histories of childhood trauma, intimate partner violence, poor mental health, and/or substance abuse issues. Families are typically enrolled prenatally or within three months of birth. Once enrolled services are provided until the child's third birthday and at times can even be offered up until the child reaches the age of five. Healthy Families relies on well-trained staff, intentional curriculum, and evidence-based strategies to strengthen families and help them achieve their goals.

Healthy Families captures the teachable moments when families are most open to learning about their newborns and before adverse patterns are established. The program is free, voluntary, and not based on income, thereby minimizing many barriers families face in reaching supportive services. We build on families' strengths by teaching them evidence-based strategies to reduce stressors, develop resiliency, and establish solid attachment to their children. In this way, the program gets at the core issues that at-risk families face daily (budgeting, anger management, healthy relationship choices, nutrition, long-term planning, and problem solving). Healthy Families gives them the skill set to not only cope, but thrive, thus reducing the continuation of child abuse and neglect for the next generation.

Healthy Families includes:

- Screenings and assessments to determine families at risk for child maltreatment or other adverse childhood experiences;
- Home visiting services;
- Routine screening for child development, maternal depression and intimate partner violence;
- Parent support groups that here in North Dakota we call Parent Cafes;
- Father involvement.

The program aims to:

- Reduce child maltreatment;
- Improve parent-child interactions and children's social-emotional well-being;
- Increase school readiness;
- Promote child physical health and development;
- Promote positive parenting;
- Promote self-sufficiency;
- Increase access to primary care medical services and community services and
- Decrease child injuries and emergency department use.

Lutheran Social Services has been delivering home visitation services utilizing this model since 1999. First piloted in the Grand Forks area as a response to the stressors following the great Red River Flood of 1997, we joined together with others in the community knowing that so many in our communities were severely impacted and would be at greater risk of child abuse, drug abuse and mental health issues. The program later would expand based upon the recognition of all it contributed to a wide array of positive outcomes. Burleigh and Morton counties were added in

2008 and now most recently in April of 2019 our reach increased to eleven total counties as seven new counties came online with the addition of Walsh and Pembina counties to the northeastern area and also five counties surrounding the Watford City and Dickinson areas.

This 2Gen approach of serving parents and children together has a unique double- edged benefit. Research has documented that a parents' education, economic and health stability can positively impact the health and well-being of a child. Similarly, a child's education and healthy development is a powerful catalyst for parents as well. We know health starts in our homes, schools and communities. The Healthy Families program impacts a child right from the start with the prenatal or right after birth approach.

When breaking down the social determinants of health into their areas, a program like Healthy Families has far reaching impact:

- Economic stability: employment goals due to their relationship to well-being of the individual and the financial stability of the family may be developed and supported; financial literacy is built through active teaching and assistance with budgeting.
- Physical environment: safe and affordable housing may be an area family need assistance with; understanding how to create a safe environment for an infant and toddler is actively taught as well as access to safety aides provided.
- Education: early childhood education is an integral aspect of the program – helping parents to understand and promote their child's healthy development and when developmental delays may be identified, assuring the early identification and remediation occurs is key. A parent's own educational goals are fostered through goal setting and support, knowing that often a parent's motivation is at its highest for wanting to be the best they can be following the birth of a child.

- Food: promoting breast feeding, healthy nutrition for both parents and children and assuring food security is of high importance.
- Community and Social Context: building social capital for participants by linking them to other connections and fostering relationships with other parents through the participation in parent groups provide important connectedness. Social isolation can lead to anxiety, depression, substance abuse and over all struggles with long reaching negative impacts to not only parent but child due to the impact on a parents' ability to read cues and respond to their child's needs. The strong positive relationship that is built over time between family support specialist and parent helps protect against this isolation that can be a higher risk at a time of first parenting.
 - Health Care System: connectedness to health care providers can be strengthened by the establishment of a medical home, reduction of barriers that can get in the way of keeping well baby checks and immunization schedules pay great benefits.

There are many exciting developments that may pave the way for greater support of these programs. The Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and payers becoming willing to recognize the value of models such as these that address the social determinants of health as well as various pay for outcomes methods may all contribute to a further commitment to fund these services beyond the pockets in the state that have been driven more by the private sectors commitment to grow to a more adequate scaling allowing for all parents regardless of zip code to have access. As an organization that has served children and families across North Dakota for 100 years we see the immense value in this service and know others are as well.

We would strongly encourage your support of finding new ways to allow for payment of home visitation services like the Healthy Families model. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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