

Finding Common Ground Meeting Summary

April 19, 2008

Introduction

On April 19, 2008, the Human Services Coordinating Council hosted seventy-one individuals representing human services advisory bodies, service organizations, and consumers at the Finding Common Ground Forum. The Forum served to build relationships and identify commonalities that exist amongst the variety of groups within the human services community. Using the County budget as the backdrop for conversation, attendees actively participated in exercises that brought forward common issues significant to all present, regardless of the population served or represented.

The exercises allowed participants to share with one another pressing concerns and converse about the mutual significance of many issues. Ultimately, participants created messages that could be universally supported and that would most widely benefit the variety of individuals in need of human services.

The following provides a summary of the Finding Common Ground Forum.



Pressing Issues

As participants entered the meeting, they were asked to write down their pressing concerns in regard to the County budget and its impact on quality of life in Sacramento County. In total, 55 comments were submitted. The following is a complete listing of comments.

- Increase in barriers to access of services further impacting services to the un/underinsured
- Further elimination of preventive services
- Increased rates of STDs – especially in teens & females
- Teen pregnancy
- Lack of communicating/assisting patients in how to access services
- Need for unified advocacy at state level regarding health/budget issues affecting local providers
- Information on services need to be accessible to all people
- Lack of resources for at risk youth – in J.J. all aspects and seniors
- Lack of resources for homeless youth/seniors
- Lack of services for veterans
- To many clients and little money, especially in light of the mounting aging population
- What child services will be most affected by the deficits and those for seniors
- By cutting basic services to at-risk populations – we increase the services at our “ER’s” and with law enforcement – cost effective prevention programs shouldn’t be cut!
- Review more “joint venture” and “partnering” programs to save resources
- Equity in budget cuts (don’t cut just from one area)
- Lack of services between children’s and adult services
- Access to medical services
- Focus on prevention and intervention
- Maintaining community support
- Peer support
- Don’t gut mental health programs/services
- Education cuts
- Increased tobacco taxes
- Infant mortality
- Long wait to see psychiatrist by persons with co-occurring disorders
- Need for solid plans and drills to handle emergencies, such as floods or toxic spills
- More sober living facilities needed in many neighborhoods
- Lack of affordable accessible housing
- Drug and alcohol prevention services collaboration!
- Disability access needs must compete for funds even though access to services is legally mandated
- Need for family support services in Citrus Heights
- Healthcare
- Families dropped off Medi-cal
- Freeze unnecessary new positions
- Fewer services available to poor while State, County, City workers make more.
- Infant mortality
- Health disparities
- Mental health services targeted to prevention
- Affordable housing/mixed housing projects
- Vocational training/educational programs for at-risk youth over 18 years old
- Medi-cal rate cuts and payment delays threaten survival of primary care providers
- Loss of pediatric and STD services in Oak Park
- Viral Hepatitis misinformation, bottleneck at the specialty level, no adult vaccine programs
- People need access to proper food and nutrition
- Prepare (e.g. educate) more M.D.’s for HIV care in light of new CDC guidelines
- Prepare (educate) more M.D.’s for geriatric care
- Culturally competent services – especially healthcare
- School-based mental health services for children and families
- Dental care for children and seniors
- Prevention and health promotion have been sacrificed on the alter of public safety
- Comprehensive, continuing care for foster youth aging out of foster care – mental health, financial, job training, housing
- Increasing unemployment and/or low paying jobs leading to more people needing assistance from agencies already overburdened
- Maintaining adequate funding for “existing” community – based mental health services
- Developing adequate services for persons with co-occurring disorders (mental health and AOD)
- Funding smoking cessation services for pregnant and other persons in our service networks
- Provide assistance to disabled individuals to secure SSI/SSA/Medi-cal benefits

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The participant comments were condensed by collapsing similar statements. Even after “condensing”, 29 pressing concerns remained and were re-presented to the group for review. Participants were then asked to indicate which concerns impacted the populations that they work with or represent. In a showing of the interrelated nature of human services, eighteen of the issues were highlighted as a common concern by more than twenty participants, with eight of those issues highlighted by more than thirty participants. On the other hand, only two of the issues were highlighted as concerns by fewer than 10 participants. The issues that were most commonly agreed to as pressing concerns were:

- *Health*
 - Lack of preventive health services
 - Lack of access to medical services
- *Mental Health*
 - Collaborative prevention efforts
- *Youth*
 - Lack of a comprehensive continuum of care for foster youth aging out of the system
 - Lack of vocational training/educational programs for at-risk youth
 - Lack of services for at-risk youth
- *Other*
 - Cutting basic services to at-risk populations
 - Lack of equity in budget cuts

Messages

After examining the pressing concerns, participants engaged in small group discussion to identify a key issue and develop a message that they think needs to be heard by decision makers. Core messages developed were:

- **Key Point – Invest in prevention**
 - Cutting prevention will lead to enormous future costs as realized through criminal justice, alcohol and drug treatment, mental health treatment, homelessness, and other costs.
 - Conversely, funding prevention services will have long term fiscal benefit
 - Quantifying the fiscal impact of prevention services across the service continuum is necessary.
- **Key Point – Maintain services for most at-risk**
 - There is an immediate and ongoing need to serve the most frail who are unable to speak for themselves.
- **Key Point – Improve access to services**
 - There needs to be better promotion of the services that are available, both to populations in need and to other provider agencies.

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- Access to services needs to be streamlined and made functional for all cultures and capacities.
- **Key point – Expand safe and affordable housing**
 - Stable housing is a prerequisite for overcoming other challenges (e.g. substance abuse).
 - Availability of all types of housing (e.g. temporary, transitional, permanent) needs to be expanded.

Next Steps

Participants are encouraged to take these messages back to their constituencies for review and consideration. Ideally, human services advocates will utilize similar messages when advising policy and other decision makers so as to present a common, non-competing direction. The Human Services Coordinating Council will be framing recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and other County decision makers around these issues. All actions of the Human Services Coordinating Council between now and the County budget hearings will be shared with Finding Common Ground participants. Feedback on and participation in all activities will be encouraged.

As was mentioned by Penelope Clarke, the attendees of the Finding Common Ground forum are ambassadors and must tell the stories of those who are most in need and share practical approaches for dealing with those issues. In addition, human services interests must continue to work with one another to share ideas and address core barriers. The Finding Common Ground forum was a jumping off point to further build relationships amongst advocates in the human services community. The Human Services Coordinating Council will strive to build on the momentum generated at the event and strongly encourages all the participants to actively use the effort as a vehicle to communicate with one another about emerging and ongoing issues.

Contact information has been shared amongst all participants to foster ongoing communication and collaboration. Information is also being shared through HSCC's monthly newsletter, *Human Services NewsBlast*, which briefly reports on happenings in the County that may be of interest to the human services community. Individuals can be added to the distribution list by emailing hsc@communitycouncil.org

Contact

Human Services Coordinating Council
c/o Alan Lange, staff
909 12th Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 447-7063 x360
alange@communitycouncil.org