

APPENDIX VIII

Methodology

Purpose

This final appendix provides a guide for updating of the statistics appearing in the full report and its appendices. It also suggests some of the limitations of existing data resources for use in planning services to meet the needs of Montgomery County residents.

Appendix I. Summary of Selected Community Needs Assessments in the Philadelphia Metropolitan Area and Its Sub-regions

We have tried to build in the body of this report on the main needs distilled from the many local assessments conducted either to satisfy funding sources or to call attention to new problems. However, new assessments are constantly being completed and abstracts of existing assessments soon become dated. Most rely on the same secondary data sources and interviews with local experts. For example, “Childbirth at a Crossroads in Southeastern Pennsylvania,” a report authored by Dr. Gene Bishop and released by the Maternity Care Coalition at the end of September 2006, highlights the increasing inequities and declining access to maternity services for low income families in Montgomery County and the region as a whole. The report helps to vividly reinforce one of the major conclusions of our own report. [See: http://www.momobile.org/pdf/MCC_Childbirth%20at%20a%20Crossroads.pdf]

In general, the more such assessments can be coordinated and the more they can be embedded into the actual evaluation and improvement of services the more useful they will be. It is, of course, not possible to do this just by producing one-shot reports. It may be useful to consider different mechanisms,

coordinating and assisting such evaluations within the county, for example, using a research and evaluation committee or center.

Appendix II. What Works: Strategies for Improving the Health and Quality of Life of a Population

This annotated bibliography provides a selective scan of innovated approaches that have been taken elsewhere on topics of interest to the steering committee. We searched Web resources and literature databases available through the Temple University Library system (such as Ovid, Lexis-Nexis), and the review served as useful background for us in completing the report.

Journals and practitioner newsletters probably provide the best and easiest to access source for updating. A good deal more leg work would be necessary to determine which of these approaches might be useful to adopt. Similar mechanisms for coordinating and assisting in assessments suggested for improving the assessment efforts summarized in Appendix I may be useful here as well.

Appendix III. Demographics

The U.S. Census Bureau Web site provides easy updating of all the demographic information. Detailed demographic information is provided from the census (2000) for minor civil division. Regional statistics were compiled by combining the minor civil divisions for the most commonly used census reports (DP1-DP4), and more narrowly focused queries and tables can also be easily downloaded from this source as well. [See: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=DEC&_lang=en&_ts=] County level updates for 2004 were obtained on most statistics from the annual American Community

Survey that makes estimates from a survey sample. [Now available for 2005; [See: http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet?_program=ACS&_submenuId=datasets_1&_lang=en&_ts=] Reports providing minor civil division estimates for years between the decennial census and forecasts can be purchased from commercial demographic services for a modest fee, as was done in completing the county's BomerANG project.

Appendix IV. Regional Arts and Cultural Organizations

The listing of arts and cultural organizations was supplied by the Temple Metropolitan Indicators Projects. A map of the location of these organizations as well as many other statistics and maps can be downloaded from the Web site. [See: <http://www.temple.edu/mpip/>] The regional statistical tables, maps of arts and cultural indicators as well as other areas of information considered in the Montgomery County report are updated annually.

Appendix V. Health Statistics

The Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of Health Statistics and Research Web site provides an excellent resource, with all the updated statistics and guides to their use that one might need. [See: <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=175&Q=228721>]

For guidance on particular calculations, see the following:

Computing Age-Adjusted Rates [See: <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=175&q=201904>]

Computing Confidence Intervals of Rates [See: <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=175&q=201946>]

Making Local Behavior Risk Factor Survey Estimates

The Pennsylvania Behavioral Risk Factor Survey is conducted annually and the results are reported on the Web [See: <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/cwp/view.asp?a=175&q=201869>]. One can use this information to track trends in the state for self

reported health, use of preventive services and risk behaviors, comparing them to national trends. [See: <http://www.cdc.gov/BRFSS/>] We have used the Pennsylvania Behavioral Risk Factor Survey results to make local area "synthetic" estimates using an approach similar to that recommended by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. [See: <http://www.dsf.health.state.pa.us/health/lib/health/BRFSS/PA2004/synthesepabrfss2004web.pdf>] The approach uses state-wide estimates, adjusted for the age of the local area population. Age is the best predictor of responses to most of the items included in the survey. We have added income, generally the second best predictor of responses to most of the items included in the survey. The cross-tabulations of age and income used for this purpose are presented in Appendix V and illustrate the strong relationship between age and income and most Behavioral Risk Factor Survey measures. These were supplied by special request from the Montgomery County project by the Pennsylvania Department of Health's Division of Statistical Support. We then used similar breakdown of income and age from the 2000 census to estimate for the five Montgomery County regions as well as for Pottstown and Norristown to weight these results to come up with estimates for these local areas. Thus, our estimates adjust for age and income differences within these local areas of Montgomery County. For the purposes of estimating, for planning services, the overall size of the population in each of these areas, this is probably sufficient. For estimating the impact of special programs and interventions (for example, to increase use of preventive services or to reduce behavioral risks), one would need to rely on local area surveys or other regularly collected local area information.

Appendix VI. School Statistics

The school statistics provided in this report are annually updated and available on the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Web site [See: <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/pas/site/default.asp> for test score performance results and <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12statistics/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=70724> demographic characteristics of pupils in schools and school districts.] In addition, Standard

and Poors currently provides a convenient summary of these statistics by school districts. [See <http://www.schoolmatters.com>] Note however, that self-reported statistics such as these may include errors and missing data and need to be interpreted with caution particularly in comparing one school district to another.

Appendix VII. Criminal Justice Statistics

Crimes are reported by local police departments and available in annual, uniform, crime reports on the Pennsylvania State Police Web site. [See <http://ucr.psp.state.pa.us/UCR/Reporting/Annual/AnnualSumArrestUI.asp> and <http://ucr.psp.state.pa.us/UCR/Reporting/Query/RptQueryMainUI.asp>] Just as with school statistics, crime statistics are self-reported, and thus may include errors and or may be missing data; they need to be interpreted with caution, particularly in comparing one community to another.

A Final Comment on Methodology

There is a certain tyranny in statistical measurement in that what get measured becomes important, guiding goals and the assessment of the performance of health and social service organizations. Often, the more important things do not get measured because they are just too difficult to measure well.

Most challenging is thinking through all of the complex interrelations between all the different areas for which statistics are collected and determining what makes a difference in improving the health and welfare of a community. The demographic trends such as income and poverty affect the health, school, crime, and social welfare statistics, as this report has illustrated. Any component of the larger health and social service system can make its own indicators and statistics look better by shifting more difficult problems onto other components of the system. (for example, removing chronic behavioral problems from the schools to the criminal justice system, concentrating on improving the outcomes of surgical procedures while avoiding the management of care for more chronic problems, and the like). This assessment effort has tried to avoid such compartmentalization.