

**Top Concerns Impacting Quality of Life in 2018**  
**Polk-Norman-Mahnomen Counties**

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*“What do you believe are the 2-3 most important issues that should be addressed in order to help further improve the quality of life for people in our community/county?”*

**Community Social Connectedness**

- Historical trauma/hopelessness
- People lack social networks
- Opportunity to appreciate and embrace other racial/ethnic backgrounds– hospital baby naming, food choices, faith and culture related observances
  - Need to increase global awareness (citizens/religion)... not “those” people
  - Recognize our commonalities and differences
- Opportunity for more civic and community engagement
  - Lack of connectedness with community partners and churches/faith based organizations
  - Community members not feeling valued
  - Not all people feel welcome
  - Opportunity to engage community in “envisioning” the future – strategic planning/ comprehensive plans
- Opportunity for more places for individuals and families to gather
  - Increase kid friendly family events
  - Opportunity for more marketing of community and family events
  - Guided activities besides school sponsored
    - More activities for our youth in the summer
- Positive social connections for youth are needed
  - Teach youth more life and job skills, adults model active listening and respect
  - Opportunity for adults to build relationships with youth that offer resiliency skills for the youths constant peer pressure to make poor choices
  - Reduce non-productive screen time – opportunity for Unplug Electronics’ initiatives
  - Opportunity for intergenerational learning and role modelling
- Opportunity to teach, promote and share gratitude - it helps us feel good and it inspires us/others to do good

**Poverty**

- Four types of poverty: 1) generational, 2) addiction, 3) ‘caught in the middle’ (working poor) and 4) situational (bad luck). Major concerns in the region centered on:
  - Generational
  - Addictions
  - Lower middle income – ‘caught in the middle.’ (such as high insurance cost/high deductible, affordability- student lunch, home delivered meals, and high student loan debt)
- Basic needs not being met (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs)

## Housing

- Affordability (apartment rentals are expensive compared to the region)- High housing costs in proportion to income- affordable housing provides stability and helps prevent homelessness and reduces difficult budget trade-offs of essential needs, such as food, transportation and healthcare
- Need availability of diverse type of housing (multi-unit housing/single family, etc.)
  - Safe, secure and stable housing
  - Poor living conditions for some low income housing options
  - Accommodate a mix of demographics (young professionals, low to moderate incomes, starter homes, and empty nesters)

## Schools

- Need to implement innovative strategies to promote mental well-being and resilience and continue to support mental health services
  - Need to continue addressing bullying and increase in suicides/hospital treated self injuries
    - Technology/social media based bullying
    - Bullying involving youth and/or parents
  - Increased training for staff to recognize signs of depression
  - Continue co-located mental health professionals
  - Need more mental health/mental well-being focused professional staff
  - Opportunity to become “Trauma Informed School”
- Education quality
  - Lack of options around instruction, elective opportunities and transferable life skills
    - One size fits all approach currently
      - Need to meet students where they are at - differential instruction
    - Loss of high school elective opportunities (especially in technical fields and/or gifted students as budgets tighten)
    - The importance of teaching our youth basic life and job skills
- Higher education challenge to increase the availability of eligible employees relative to the demands of the workforce
- Continue to support early childhood screenings and strategies to ensure that all kids are reading by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- School/community relationship needs to be strong/greater interconnectedness
  - School shut down/affects entire community
- Opportunity to work with community partners to support protective factors (increase an individual’s ability to avoid risk for adverse health and educational outcomes and promotes social and emotional competence to be successful in the future) and primary prevention in schools
- Other programs
  - More comprehensive, routine DARE-like programming
  - More regular and age appropriate growth and development/reproductive/sexual health education

## **Transportation**

- Need to plan and design roads with consideration and balance of all users such as people using cars, trucks, bicycles, emergency vehicles, and walking.
  - The current cultural norm is motor vehicle focused.
- Public Bus Transportation
  - Stigma of riding the bus
  - Carry-on limits can be a problem if going to the grocery store.
  - Transportation fares are expensive for low income, especially if the family has multiple riders
  - Limited evening and weekend bus to travel to basic amenities (ex. grocery stores)
- No or limited public transportation in many small towns which decreases opportunities to eat healthy, attend social gathering, get basic amenities, etc.; Need for rides outside of medical appointments

## **Jobs/Employment**

- Job/skills mismatch
- Gap between workers' wages and the cost of their basic needs is growing (lack of a living wage)
  - Jobs that are available possess no or high deductible health insurance benefits, and/or do not have benefits until after probationary period
- “Baby boomers” retirements require succession planning
  - Opportunity to explore recruitment and retention strategies
- Generational differences in work preferences- work at home option, flexible scheduling, experiences
  - Opportunity for employers to offer employee and wellness benefits/programs desired by younger workforce
  - How workforce mentoring is defined varies by generation (i.e. control factor)
- Workplace environments often lack policies and practices that reflect the realities of families without adequate childcare (flexible schedules, bring kids to work, breastfeeding/pumping space and time, etc.)
- Employer and community based solutions needed for home and center-based childcare
- High turnover rates are demoralizing for young professionals with fragile families (income, stress, housing, ability to be healthy)
- Some small towns lack big businesses companies and vibrant downtown business
- Lack of job opportunities in small towns (especially if you aren't from the area or are culturally diverse)
- Need agriculture, manufacturing and construction trade jobs for sustainability
- Increase access to online training/distant learning for entry level jobs

## **Healthcare**

- Need access to appropriate, timely and affordable healthcare
- High emergency room utilization
- Poor patient adherence of identified health issues
- ‘Sick Care’ focused treatment but a desire for preventive care
  - Most medical providers aren't trained in lifestyle medicine
- Prioritized community health needs for healthcare entities across the region - obesity, prediabetes, diabetes, mental health, and substance abuse
- Co-morbidities (physical and/or mental) are a major focus
- Need to focus on preventive health visits and health coaches (team care) for lifestyle medicine
- Well Child/Child and Teen Checkup exams – high no show rate/often don't reschedule
- Patients need the ability to obtain and understand basic health information and cost needed to make appropriate health decisions (health literacy)

## **Mental Health**

- Stigma continues surrounding mental illness for all ages
  - Effects of chronic stress
  - Poor coping/resilience skills
- Lack access to mental health services unless in a crisis
- Need to reframe mental illness to mental well-being or spectrum of well-being
- Need more mental health professionals to meet the growing need
  - Patient and care teams would benefit from additional coordination of services
- Increased depression and anxiety
- Increased suicide deaths
  - Continue to promote suicide prevention hotline and crisis response teams
  - Promote programs and policies that prevent abuse, bullying (at schools/workplaces) and social exclusion while building social connectedness
- Focus efforts on youth
  - Inform community members and professionals on the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences
  - Trauma- skills and tools needed to help people heal through their own trauma
- Elderly – concerns of depression/social isolation
- Increased loneliness
  - Social isolation devastating for those with mental illness
  - Need community connectedness (faith based, neighborhood)
- Lack of prevention focus (too many people just look for the quick fix/pill)
- Need continued support for emergency responders, law enforcement and correctional staff who regularly respond to difficult situations

## **Families and Children**

- Breakdown of nuclear family
- Lack affordable, age appropriate childcare (all people – especially people of color) and would benefit from employer/community solutions

## **Obesity/Prediabetes**

- Low physical activity (i.e. worksites are less active, and youth are less active outside of the school setting)
  - Need community-wide healthy living and physical activity opportunities
- Poor nutrition choices and options
  - Nutritious food served at school but not continued/encouraged at home
  - Nutrition education needed for all socioeconomics
  - Lack access to healthy foods - number of grocery stores/convenience stores and then availability within store; lack of food shelves in small towns
  - Difficult getting people to utilize food programs (e.g., free summer food programs for youth)
- Opportunity for medical providers to be trained to “ask and address/refer”
- More lifestyle change programs designed for people with prediabetes have been offered
- Community design needed that promotes physical activity and growing/eating fresh fruits and vegetables (encourage spending time outdoors, physical activity, gardening, and social interaction)
  - Need more trails, dog parks, etc.
    - Walking and multi-modal not accepted by the general public as the norm
    - Sidewalks/buildings (not friendly for elderly or those with limited mobility/disabilities)
  - Lack of physical activities
  - Perception of unsafe communities
  - In need of community support of family/parenting learning opportunities

## Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs - substance use/misuse

- Age of onset (first use), lack perception of harm and 30-day use rates
- Vaping (especially in youth) is on the rise/need to educate and review, enforce laws
- Opioid epidemic
- Need detox options that are connected/near hospitals
- Need more local, timely treatment centers

## Demographic Trends

- Increasing retirements and aging population
- Youth out migration- moving away after high school
- Influx of middle age adults with children

*From May-June 2018, over 55 individuals participated in Key Informant interviews with public health staff held throughout Polk, Norman and Mahnomen Counties. Participants were asked to think broadly about different recurring needs and concerns of clients and the general population. An in-depth analysis of the question, "What do you believe are the 2-3 most important issues that should be addressed in order to help further improve the quality of life for people in our community (county)?" is provided through a concept map. A concept map was developed in order to assist readers in understanding the large volume of information provided. While the qualitative items identified in the concept map are incomplete in terms of exhausting phenomena contributing to the quality of life within the region, at this time it is a highlight of those recurring items viewed by participants as most influential.*



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