# MACON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH
## MINUTES
## 7/23/2024

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| **Members:** | Garrett Higdon, Engineer; Paul Higdon, County Commissioner; Vacant, Optometrist; Dr. Roy Lenzo, Veterinarian; Vacant, Pharmacist; Dr. Matt Corbin, Dentist; Ellen Shope, Nurse Representative and Vice Chair; Dr. Michael Dupuis, Physician; Members of General Public, Jerry Hermanson Chair, Dr. Charlie Vargas; Vacant, General Member |
| **Members Absent:** | Paul Higdon, Dr. Roy Lenzo, |
| **Staff Present:** | Kathy McGaha, Jimmy Villiard, Jennifer Garrett, Melissa Setzer, Jeremy Pless, Kristina Loughborough |
| **Guests:** | None |
| **Media:** | None |
| **Call to Order:** | Jerry Hermanson called the meeting to order at 6:17 p.m. |
| **Welcome/Intro/ Departures/ Recognition/ Announcements:** | Kathy McGaha, Health Director, shared some of the departures of employees that are leaving the Health Department:  Amanda Cowart, Jeremy Pless, Darlene Debty and April Blanton.  Jerry Hermanson asked about exit interviews.  And Kathy said yes we do exit interviews.  These are related to other opportunities, promotions and pay increases. |
| **Public Comment:** | None |
| **Agenda Approval:** | Dr. Michael Dupuis made a motion to approve the Agenda. Garrett Higdon seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. |
| **Presentation:** | |
| **School Health EOY Report** | Jennifer Garrett, DON, Clinical Services Section Admin., shared her report on "Navigating the Evolving Landscape of School Health 22/23 vs. 23/24." |

**Presentation Continued…**

There was some discussion at the conclusion of Jennifer's report.

Jerry Hermanson wondered why some of the data did not seem to match up. Jennifer explained that kids come and go at school. We can only report on what data we actually have. We don't have enough nurses to cover everything. We have 4 nurses. We have one position open. So we can have 5 nurses. Ideally it would be nice to have 11 school nurses, one for each school. Kathy said that this info is what is provided to the state at the end of the year.

Jennifer said now that COVID is over, the school system is once again coming back to be trained by Jennifer. It had fallen by the way side during COVID.

Dr. Charlie Vargas asked if Dogwood Trust had any say in what the school nurses do. Jennifer said they had only given a very small amount of money and they pretty much do not.

Dr. Matt Corbin asked about the Tele Health program that Julie Rogers is doing and if that is helping the situation. Jennifer said that it is very helpful, but she can only do so much. Jennifer did talk about the NC Health App that students can put on their phones.

Dr. Michael Dupuis asked about the suicide prevention program. Jennifer said we have a good relationship with Angel and they are doing a great job with this. Also, we do meet with parents.

Dr. Charlie Vargas asked about the Parents Bill of Rights. Jennifer explained about how we have to inform the parents of actions.

Garrett Higdon asked about the school nurses. Jennifer said we have 4, with one position open. Ideally we need 11, one for each school.

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**2nd Presentation:**

**Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas – Food Insecurities Assessment Results (Mountainwise)**

Jimmy Villiard, Population Health Section Administrator, gave a presentation on the Macon County Community Food Assessment Results.

# Presentation Continued…

**Executive Summary Document: Population Health Trends, Emerging Issues, and Strategic Opportunities Identified in a Community Food Assessment of Jackson, Swain and Macon Counties, Spring 2023- Spring 2024**

Community food security has been a longstanding challenge to the health and wellbeing of lower-income households in Western North Carolina (WNC), with over one in five households experiencing food insecurity in 2021 (WNCHN Data Workbook, 2021). Over the last three years, negative trends in household and population food security in the WNC region have increased and accelerated. These changes to population food security are primarily driven by macro-level issues, including: inflation in the cost of consumer goods (particularly groceries), increased cost-of-living, and the expiration/reduction of COVID-19 pandemic-era safety net programs and benefits programs for financial assistance and food security. As a result, there has been an unprecedented increase in use of food pantries and community food resources by food insecure households in this region in the last three years. This increase in demand for emergency food services, in tandem with the rising cost of food, has stretched the capacity of food service organizations to serve their clients. This has created new challenges around budgeting, fundraising, staffing, and in many organizations' ability to provide services to clients.

This report details the findings and analysis from a community food assessment covering three WNC counties in the Far West region (Jackson County, Macon County and Swain County) during the period from Spring 2023-Spring 2024. This assessment focused on information and data relevant to the charitable food environment and the food security status of low-income residents of these three counties.

These surveys deliberately targeted county residents with elevated risk for household food insecurity based on their use of emergency food services and/or other services targeting the needs of low-income households. This was a non-random sampling strategy and convenience sampling model based on surveying the clients who showed up to receive services on the days when on-site data collection was being conducted. As a result, this survey data is not a random sample of each county's population, and is not meant to estimate the overall prevalence of household food insecurity within the total population. However, **much of the secondary data and the qualitative interview data provides strong and consistent evidence supporting a hypothesis that overall food insecurity has roughly doubled within these three counties over the last 1-2 years.**This hypothesis needs to be further tested using random sampling techniques in order to determine how accurate these estimates may be. **However we have substantial evidence from our research that the number of county residents using emergency food services in each county has approximately doubled within this timeframe, or experienced even more dramatic increases.** While this finding alone is

critical and actionable, we believe it is also an indication that overall food security for the total population has undergone similar changes in the same timeframe.

Beyond supporting evidence and hypotheses on the extent of overall changes to population food insecurity, the data collected in this assessment demonstrate that **substantial negative changes to the health, wellbeing, and security of food insecure people in these three counties have taken place during the last 1-2 years**. This assessment documents important **risk factors and co-occurring issues** that add complexity to our understanding of what life is currently like living with food insecurity in the three-county area. Furthermore, we document that the local emergency food relief system is struggling to keep pace with increased local demand, and almost all organizations that provide food services to this population are confronting major challenges in resource constraints, food shortages, budgeting, and their overall ability to meet their clients' needs.

We conducted 22 qualitative interviews with directors or food and human service organizations serving low-income county residents. Interviews focused on trends in demand for services, barriers to being able to provide adequate services to meet community needs, and priorities and strategies for addressing needs within the context of rapidly increasing demand for services. Subsequently, patrons and clients of many of these and other charitable food distribution organizations were recruited to complete a series of short surveys covering a variety of topics, including: household food security status, healthy food access, SNAP/WIC usage and barriers, food pantry usage and barriers, mental health related to food security, chronic disease status, and access to internet service. In total, clients of these organizations completed 521 surveys from November 2023-March 2024.

Major Findings

1. The number of residents using emergency food services in the 3-county area has doubled or experienced even more dramatic increases in the last 1-2 years, and this increase is continuing presently at unprecedented levels. This is an indicator that overall food insecurity within this area has also undergone similar increases within this timeframe, and is continuing to deteriorate. The primary age and household demographics reported being impacted by this increase in **new** use of emergency food services are **older adults and households with young children.**

2. The population of food insecure people using community food resources is experiencing **extremely high rates of severe food insecurity and hunger,** including among households with children. These rates dramatically exceed recent historical federal rates for severe food insecurity and hunger among food insecure households. Within this population, these rates are often over 80% for adults, and in households with children, the rates of children's hunger were reported at between 23.6% (for children skipping meals within the last 12 months as a result of a lack of money for food) and 47.2% (for children not eating enough within the last 12 months). These findings indicate that dramatic increases in hunger are outpacing the estimated rates of increase in overall food insecurity within the food insecure population of these counties, and have potentially quadrupled in total within this 1-2 year timeframe.

3. The organizations and programs supporting the food security needs of county residents are experiencing increased pressure and resource strain in attempting to meet the increased demand for services. This is creating significant limitations to organizational capacity, budgeting, and ability to serve clients. MANNA Food Bank reports an additional 300,000 instances of food service to clients of their food pantry network in 2023, without any substantial increase in food distribution. The average increase in clients served within the last 12 months reported by food pantry directors was over 100%, and many individual pantries reported serving 6,000-10,000 unique clients within the last year, comprising significant portions of these rural county populations in their own right.

4. These population food security changes are having a powerful negative impact on the mental health of the population experiencing food insecurity. More than 4 out of 5 survey respondents reported that they experienced regular or frequent stress and anxiety as a result of food insecurity. These issues are a major source of mental health issues for a significant portion of the counties' population, and are unlikely to be addressed by increased mental healthcare access. Over 7 in 10 respondents reported that their access to SNAP/WIC benefits, free and reduced lunch programs for children in schools, and/or use of food pantries or other community food resources was a significant source of relief for these mental health issues.

5. Over 80% of food insecure residents lack regular and reliable access to the internet, including by smartphone, and nearly 1 in 5 survey respondents reports having no access at all to the internet, and no cell phone. This population is thereby harder to reach via these means for education, outreach, inclusion in population health assessments, and other relevant purposes. This population also has a harder time accessing information and programs that could support household food security.

6. 45% of the food insecure residents in our sample were not enrolled in either WIC or SNAP, and the large majority of the unenrolled participants indicated that they would like to be able to enroll in these programs.

7. Over 85% of food insecure residents reported not receiving enough food through existing sources to address hunger needs, including those who are using food pantries and community food resources, and 86.6% are not receiving adequate nutrition. This is particularly relevant given that only 25% of this population reported no diagnosis of diet-related disease and chronic illness.

Opportunities for Action and Next Steps

The major findings above are actionable in several ways, including items that will expand our understanding of these emerging issues and provide more accurate quantitative estimates of these issues within the broader population. Beyond addressing the need for more complete and up-to-date information on the changing state of food security within the region, these findings provide a template and some priorities for immediate action and future investment to address these issues.

1. Expand the community food assessment process into other locations in WNC. These issues are not isolated to the 3 county sample, but the three counties surveyed in these assessments are all very rural with less dense population centers than several other counties across the WNC region. These findings demonstrate that there are emerging issues about which there is still much to learn. Regional strategic planning to address these issues can be supported through identification of local issues and by developing a comprehensive regional map of community food security needs across the WNC area.
   a. This process can ideally be incorporated into the existing CHA/CHIP cycles in order to integrate data and analysis from both datasets, and to enhance our ability to interpret both datasets with an enriched understanding of the relevant issues.

2. Develop educational campaigns to expand local SNAP and WIC enrollment for qualifying residents, utilizing digital and non-digital strategies.

3. Develop systems for aggregation and coordinated food purchasing / storage / distribution between food pantries and other community food organizations, including the possibility of developing new (and enhancing the capacity of existing) food hubs in WNC that could scale up this kind of activity. These actions could allow pantries to share resources and coordinate bulk purchasing to save on food purchasing budgets, and could be utilized to increase pantry access to local, fresh produce and farm products for their clients, supporting both client nutritional needs and local agribusiness.

4. Advocate for state and federal allocations towards programs that both address the acute need to enhance emergency food access and the longer-term need to enhance the capacity of the regional food system to provide access to adequate and nutritious food for low-income households and other residents with high risk of food insecurity., This advocacy should target policies for local agricultural purchasing for charitable distribution, and should also include a bottom-up strategy that focuses on local funders providing additional funding support towards local food security efforts and organizations.

5. Support the development of more robust volunteer networks to support food pantry personnel needs, and communications and referral systems between pantries in support of more equitable distribution of resources.

6. Investigate the relationship between food insecurity and mental health, as well as the gap in internet access, cell phone use, and reliable service that exists around this population. These issues of internet access and mental health have been identified as priority issues within the broader context of community health in our region. There is a need to investigate how lack of, access to the internet is impacting this population's ability to access services and relevant information impacting their food insecurity, and to investigate how their lack of digital access impacts their ability to be included in effective outreach for educational, service enrollment, and assessment purposes.

Ellen Shope talked about on a positive note how now lunches for Macon County students will be free to certain ages.

| **Presentation Continued…** | Jennifer Garrett said seniors are the ones who tend to slip through the cracks with food insecurities.  We need to be more aware of them. |
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On a positive note, Jimmy said that the Animal Services has started a Community Food Bank that has been very successful.  The food pantry give pet food to people in need to allow them to keep their pets, reducing shelter intakes and improving owner mental health.  We all need to really step up and do our part to help.

| **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes:** | Dr. Michael Dupuis made a motion to approve the Previous Meeting Minutes from 05/28/2024.  Ellen Shope seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. |
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## Old Business:

| **FY25 Budget** | Melissa Setzer, Finance Officer, gave a report on the FY25 Budget.  She went over the Budget, explaining each line item that was handed out at the meeting and answered all questions concerning the Budget. |
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| **Animal Services Update** | Jimmy Villiard, Population Health Section Administrator, gave an Animal Services Update.  He discussed how the Animal Control Officers have had to take on more responsibility with the same staffing and salary, increasing work stress and contributing to high turnover rate for ACOs. It is a very difficult position.  It would be helpful if they could have more officers.  They do have one new Animal Control Officer starting on Monday that is filling a vacant position. |
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| **Animal Services** | |
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| Microchipping for general public | $15.00 |
| Adoption - Cat | $65.00 |
| Adoption - Dog | $65.00 |
| Adoption - Special (Animals spayed or neutered prior to entering shelter) | $45.00 |
| Adoption Fee for Veterans (Dog or Cat) | $35.00 |
| Reclaim Fee | $25.00 |
| Citation - Option 1 (at officer's discretion) | $25.00 |
| Citation - Option 2 (at officer's discretion) | $50.00 |
| Pet Carrier | $5.00 |
| Quarantine Fee (per day) | $10.00 |
| Sponsor Fee | $65.00 |
| Adoption - Special Event (Festival, Fair, Holiday approved event) - Cat | $20.00 |
| Adoption - Special Event (Festival, Fair, Holiday approved event) - Dog | $30.00 |
| Adoption - Overpopulation - Cat | $10.00 |
| Adoption - Overpopulation - Dog | $20.00 |
| Adoption - Sponsored Event - fee set by sponsor | Fee set by sponsor |
| Boarding Fee (per day after notification) | $10.00 |
| Leash | 1.00/un |

**New Business:**

**FY25 Billing Guide and Fee Plan**

Melissa Setzer, Finance Officer, gave a report on the FY25 Billing Guide and Fee Plan that was handed out at the meeting.  She said that she will email the appendix to the BOH members. Travel Fees were raised when Dr. Allison Smith started as she was taking the place of what nurses used to do and spending much more time counseling the patient on what vaccines they made need.  Garrett Higdon said he had used that service and totally agreed with that assessment.

**Approval of FY25 Billing Guide:**

Dr. Michael Dupuis made a motion to approve the FY25 Billing Guide.  Garrett Higdon seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Board of Health Training Item:**

2024 NALBOH Annual Conference
Nashville, TN
August 12-14, 2024

**Approval of Going into Closed Session:**

Jerry Hermanson made a motion to go into Closed Session at 7:56 p.m..  Garrett Higdon seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Health Director Evaluation, Closed Session**

Kathy McGaha, Health Director, stayed for this session.  All of the other MCPH staff was dismissed.  This was to discuss qualification of personnel as per NC General Statute 143-318.11 (6).

**Next Meeting Date:**

The next BOH meeting will be September 24, 2024.  (We will have general updates and emerging issues, etc.)

**Adjournment:**

Jerry Hermanson made a motion to go into adjourn the meeting at 8:40 p.m.  Dr. Michael Dupuis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Minutes Recorded by:**

Kristina Loughborough