North Carolina Healthy Opportunities Pilots
Focus Group Findings
Summary | July 2022

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What is Healthy Opportunities?
The Healthy Opportunities Pilots is the nation’s first program that requires your health care providers to work with community organizations to provide services related to housing, food, transportation, and personal & household stress to people with Medicaid insurance. It is available in 3 parts of the state.

Our Research
We conducted 2 focus groups on Zoom with folks from all 3 regions receiving social support services. These focus groups brought people from diverse backgrounds.

NOTE: These focus groups happened in early May, so the experiences shared were limited to food services. However, we still asked about people’s thoughts on housing, transportation, and stress services available through the Healthy Opportunities Pilots.

Our Findings

Awareness
- People have a positive view of the program.
- Medicaid Care Managers were the most frequent entry point into the program, but doctors and word of mouth were also sources of information.
- The program filled an important gap since access to food services and social services programs is often limited, especially for those who don’t already qualify for social programs like SNAP, WIC, etc.

Getting Into the Program
- Relied on a positive and strong relationship with the doctor/nurse.
  - Otherwise, screening placed a burden on the patient.
- Started with informal discussions.
- Enrollment process was seen as difficult and could be smoother and simpler for multiple household members.
- Nurse Care Managers & other clinicians are learning how to facilitate these new interactions.

Feedback on Food Services

High Consumer Satisfaction

Unclear Communication Led to Less Knowledge of the Range of Food & Nutrition Services
For example, all participants knew of and received healthy food boxes, but no one knew they could also access healthy, prepared meals.

Range of Opinions on Choice & Variety
For example, some folks wanted the ability to customize their food boxes.

NOTE: Only food boxes were evaluated because people hadn’t received other services.

Other Social Need Areas
NOTE: Not all of the ideas below would necessarily be covered under the Pilots.

Housing
- Housing services could be beneficial because housing is complex.
- In addition to currently covered services, focus groups also highlighted potential additional areas of need:
  - Accessibility supports/repairs
    - For example, a stair lift in the house.
  - AC/Heating installation & repairs
  - Safety modifications (roof/hurricane damage, etc.)
  - Support services for both renters and homeowners, since some resources are geared towards renters.

Transportation
- Transportation services are helpful but focus group participants noted:
  - There is a large gap in public transportation in the 3 geographical regions of the Pilot.
  - Uber and Lyft (and other private transportation options) may not be options in rural areas.
  - Resolving personal vehicle issues and questions is important.
    - People’s personal vehicles are not always owned by them, but rather by a relative.

Personal & Household Stress Services
- Focus group participants were particularly interested in stress services for parents, people who faced intimate partner violence, and adolescents / young adults.
- Some key non-crisis services (which may be covered under Medicaid) people expressed a desire for:
  - anxiety & depression services
  - empowerment services & skills training
  - financial stress services.

We are continuing to study this program so if you have any feedback, please contact William K. Bleser, PhD, MSPH at william.bleser@duke.edu