

# Understanding Barriers to Healthcare in a Vulnerable Population in Dane County, WI



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## Abstract

**Background:** Vulnerable populations encounter numerous barriers to accessing healthcare services and achieving their health goals. Dane County, WI is rich in resources when compared to greater Wisconsin, but vulnerable populations in this area are not spared from these barriers. WisCARES is a community organization that provides an array of services (veterinarian, social support, housing assistance, advocacy) to a vulnerable population (individuals experiencing homelessness or financial insecurity) in Dane County, WI. WisCARES works to address these barriers utilizing a One Health Initiative. A UWSMPH Department of Family Medicine and Community Health (DFMCH) community health needs assessment (CHNA) survey performed in 2018 documented that WisCARES' clients face numerous logistical and social barriers that prevent them from accessing healthcare services, yet they have significant health concerns (physical disability, mental illness, dental issues, abuse, etc.).

**Objective:** Continuing the work of the 2018 CHNA survey, the goal of this study was to identify and develop patient-driven programs or services that support persons experiencing homelessness or financial insecurity in accessing healthcare services and achieving their health goals.

**Methods:** In this qualitative study, in-depth interviews were performed in order to gather the input of WisCARES' clients. An unbiased interview protocol was utilized to pose open-ended questions that allowed clients to express their needs, experiences, goals, and suggestions of how to enhance their access to healthcare services and better support them in achieving their health goals.

**Results:** Preliminary analysis of in-depth interview transcripts show that clients expressed several significant concerns regarding barriers to accessing healthcare services and achieving health goals. However, interviewees had many meaningful suggestions for improving access to healthcare services and aiding in reaching health goals.

**Conclusion:** Continuing to grow interdisciplinary collaboration at WisCARES to include further human medical and social services provides the opportunity to tackle many of these barriers expressed by clients. The relationship WisCARES has established with this vulnerable community makes it possible to offer additional support in accessing healthcare services and reaching health goals.



## Introduction

### One Health:

- “The One Health Initiative is a movement to forge co-equal, all inclusive collaborations between physicians, osteopathic physicians, veterinarians, dentists, nurses and other scientific-health and environmentally related disciplines.”<sup>1</sup>
- “Recognizing that human health (including mental health via the human-animal bond phenomenon), animal health, and ecosystem health are inextricably linked.”<sup>2</sup>

### Population:

- A CHNA survey performed in 2018 found that all surveyed WisCARES' clients had health insurance and had a primary care provider, but several of these individuals were not satisfied with their healthcare team. Many clients also expressed significant barriers to accessing healthcare services and maintaining stable housing status
- WisCARES provides an array of services to a vulnerable population (individuals experiencing homelessness or financial insecurity) in Dane County, WI

### Our Questions:

- How can we involve WisCARES' clients in directing the growth of services and programs offered?
- How can we support the health of both clients and companion animals at WisCARES?
- What ideas do clients have for patient-driven programs or services that would increase access to healthcare services or support them in achieving health goals?
- How can we continue to grow interdisciplinary involvement at WisCARES?

### GOAL:

Identify and develop patient-driven programs or services that support WisCARES' clients in accessing healthcare services and achieving their health goals

## Methods

### Participant Data

- 6 participants
- WisCARES' clients for at least two years
- Recruited via flyer advertisement at clinic or via phone call to clients with significant relationships with WisCARES as identified by staff

### Interview Protocol

- 14 main questions
- Variable number of follow-up questions depending on responses to main question
- Open ended
- 30-60-minute duration
- Recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes

## Results

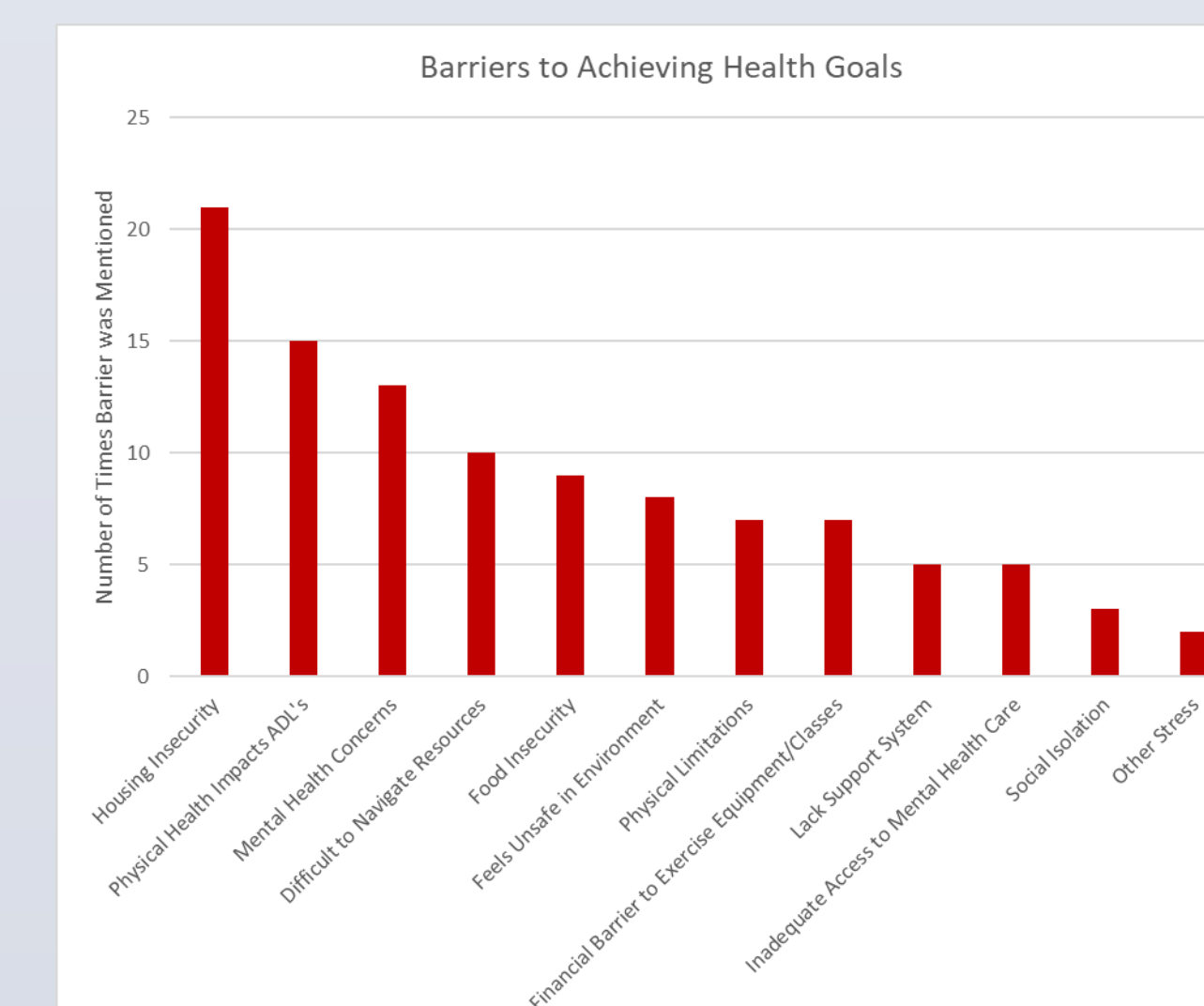
### Prominent Barriers to Accessing Healthcare Services

(Font Size Represents the Number of Times a Barrier was Mentioned in Proportion to Others)



- Difficulty navigating community resources and a complex healthcare system
- Prejudice and labeling regarding mental health, body type, socioeconomic status, etc
- Lack of involvement in the healthcare team or the decisions made regarding care management
- Feel their opinions/concerns are ignored by healthcare professionals
- Lack of adequate finances or insurance coverage
- Lack of trust in healthcare system
- No one to support them or advocate for their needs

### Prominent Barriers to Achieving Health Goals



### Patient-Driven Programs/Services Ideas

#### Peer Support Groups

- Peer-to-peer learning about navigating and accessing community resources
- Support for individuals with similar health conditions/lived experiences
- Assist in making lifestyle changes

#### Resource Navigator Program

- Assist in navigating and accessing resources

#### Patient Advocacy Program

- Support client and advocate for their needs
- Assist in understanding and navigating healthcare experiences

#### Social Events

- Host activities and networking events for clients

#### Exercise/Nutrition Classes

- Assist in developing exercise plans that are safe

#### Maintain WisCARES Free/Low-Cost Veterinarian Services

- Enables clients to keep their companion animals, which is very important for client health

## Conclusions

- A large portion of WisCARES' clients have health insurance and are connected with a primary care provider
- However, many WisCARES' clients experience barriers to accessing healthcare services and achieving their health goals
- Several feasible patient-driven program constructs, which would support clients in accessing healthcare services and achieving their health goals, have been enlightened through these interviews
- WisCARES' relationship with this vulnerable population offers an opportunity to successfully implement these patient-driven programs and services

## Future Efforts

- Continue to expand interdisciplinary involvement at WisCARES to provide holistic care to clients and their companion animals
- Ensure that supports are in place to enable clients to keep their companion animals in their lives. It is clear that this human-animal bond is vital to the mental, physical, and social well-being of clients

## Quotes

- “If I didn't have my dogs, I don't know if I'd be here to be honest with you. They make me get up every day.”
- “When you have fewer resources, I think you're even closer to your animals. They're more important, more essential to your well-being.”
- “...give that compassion first. I think that's important. If you want to distill it down to just one thing that's what I would say. The humanistic compassion first.”
- “I think animals are crucial for our health. Like holistic health, our emotional, psychological, spiritual, and physical. It's all connected and deeply connected.”
- “When you're homeless, your social network kind of falls apart.”
- “So that was shocking, that you would just be denied care because they didn't think it was important.”
- “Talking with other people can give you ideas of what you can do and sometimes you learn more from peers than you can from professionals.”

## References

- 1 About the One Health Initiative [Internet]. 2019. One Health Initiative; [cited 2019 Sep 9]. Available from <http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/about.php>
- 2 Mission Statement [Internet]. 2019. One Health Initiative; [cited 2019 Sep 9]. Available from <http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/mission.php>

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