



2010 - 2011

Advocacy Positions and Priority Actions

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Introduction

The Association of Community Services (ACS) is a membership organization comprised of over 116 health and human service organization and community advocate members. Established in 1967, ACS supports its members by providing education, advocacy, and networking opportunities to all sectors of the Howard County human services community to advance its capacity and effectiveness. Advocacy efforts currently focus on State and County issues and adhere to ACS values of respect, inclusiveness, quality and collaboration to promote access to human services for all.

Typically, ACS membership comprises (76%) private nonprofits; (12%) community advocates; (9.6%) for-profit organizations; (9%) faith-based organizations; and (5%) government organizations. Given the breadth of services, it is estimated that our members serve over 250,000 residents per year. It is understood that some residents use more than one service resulting in duplicate client encounters. Services are provided by over 10,000 full and part-time employees and volunteers.

Continuing economic issues and lack of successful resolution to the Maryland budget deficit are reflected in the ACS FY 2011 Priority Issues which include: Finances, Human Services Infrastructure, Community Infrastructure, Health Care, Work Support and Education.

Finances The FY 2011 Maryland Operating Budget (\$32 billion) reflects a one percent reduction from the FY 2010 budget which has not occurred in Maryland in over a decade. While both health and human (social) services funding has increased in the new budget, it is predominantly due to increased demand and caseloads for Medical Assistance and entitlement programs caused by the recession (*Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute, April 9, 2010*).

Human Services Infrastructure is the overall ability of Howard County human services organizations to meet the growing needs of the population. Institutional viability and sustainability are critical to ensuring that human services are available to all who need them. Sufficient qualified staff, financial stability and comprehensive resources are important components of infrastructure.

Community Infrastructure includes having adequate resources to meet a variety of needs including housing units, homeless prevention and adequate nutrition.

Health Care includes access to all health services including affordable health and long term care insurance, primary health, mental health and crisis services.

Work Support includes increased job opportunities, sufficient workforce training programs, improved public transportation and sufficient child care resources.

Education addresses those services within the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) that support families with limited incomes (up to \$50,000 for a family of four) including pupil personnel and counseling services, after school programs, English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), etc.

ACS will focus its advocacy for county residents with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). For a family of four, this would represent less than \$50,000 annual household income.

Howard County Environment

For three years, Maryland and Howard County have struggled with falling revenues and budget deficits as a result of the national recession. Howard County has weathered the economy better than the rest of Maryland and the nation yet our workers and families are finding themselves with increased costs for goods and services and increasing unemployment. Lower income families are predictably more vulnerable. Howard County's average unemployment rate increased to 5.5% in 2010 compared to 4.9% in 2009, an increase of 9% for the year (*Howard County Economic Indicators report, June 2010*).

Strikingly, many of the moderate income families are seeking assistance when they never have before as evidenced by increased requests for support and financial assistance. In 2008 (most current available data), the median household income for Howard County was \$102,540 (*U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2008*). For lower income families and especially the 9,899 individuals (3.6% of Howard County's population) (*U.S. Census 2008 American Community Survey*) who are at or below the federal poverty level (FPL) (\$22,050 for a family of four, 2010), the impact is dramatic. There are 18% (18,273), of Howard County households earning less than \$50,000 per year or approximately 200% of FPL.

Three indicators of economic impact on moderate and low income families are energy assistance, food assistance and temporary cash assistance to needy families. Prior to FY 2009, all governmental funds for energy assistance in the County were administered by the Community Action Council. In FY 2009, the Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development (HCDHCD) again assumed responsibility for rental assistance funding.

Table 1 reflects a growing trend in the need for energy assistance that has more than doubled the number of households and increased the amount of spending almost five fold.

Table 1 – Howard County

Energy Assistance	2007 Total Costs	2008 Total Costs	2009 Total Costs	2010 Total Costs	Cumulative Change %
	\$1,032,730	\$1,605,449	\$5,167,595	\$4,964,865	300% increase in funds
	2051 Households	2100 Households	4,811 Households	4,611 Households	200% increase in Households

Source: Community Action Council, August 2010

The total state Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP), Electric Universal Service Program (EUSP), and arrearage grants awarded in the County in FY 2009 totaled \$4.6 million. An additional \$500,000 came from the Fuel Fund, Crisis Intervention Initiative, Family Preservation, Community Service Partnerships Fund (CSP), Holland funds, etc.

There have been increases in the use of food assistance programs. The two year percentage increase reflects a worsening condition and serious hardship. Again, the three year trend indicates a doubling of households being served by the Food Supplement Program.

Table 2

Food Assistance	FY 2007 Total	FY 2008 Total	FY 2009 Total	FY 2010 7/1/09 – 5/31/10	Cumulative Change %
Food Bank	6,478 Families	6,614 Families	7,791 Families	12,000	54%
Food Supplement Program (formerly Food Stamps) (monthly average)	2,646 Households	3,199 Households	4,059 Households	4,692 Households	32%
	5,556 Individuals	7,038 Individuals	8,912 Individuals	10,464 Individuals	33%
Free/Reduced Meals (FARMS)	5,617 students 11.65% of total school enrollment	5,949 students 12.25% of total school enrollment	6,442 students 13% of total school enrollment		13%

Source: Community Action Council, Howard County Department of Social Services 2010, and Howard County Public School System, September 2009

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), administered by the Howard County Department of Social Services has increased again after several years of declining and/or stable enrollment.

Table 3

Child and Family Support	FY 2007 Cases	FY 2008 Cases	FY 2009 Cases	FY 2010 7/1/09 – 5/31/10	Cumulative Change %
Temporary Cash Assistance (monthly average)	341 Households	373 Households	490 Households	501 Households	25%
	821 Individuals	915 Individuals	1,232 Individuals	1,293 Individuals	29%

Source: Howard County Department of Social Services, FY 2009

The Board to Promote Self Sufficiency, established in 2008, comprised of up to 27 members including a number of County department directors, consumers and agencies serving lower income families, has a charge of reducing poverty in Howard County. The Board has selected three priorities: ending homelessness; ending hunger; and raising income/ building assets. Staff should be allocated and encouraged to seek grants to expand the work of the Board.

In addition to the current climate in Howard County, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), which has been in the planning stages for several years, will begin bringing employees and their families into the region by late 2010 and early 2011. Previously, the impact of BRAC was believed to increase the area's workforce by approximately 20,000 new jobs. It was recently learned that in addition to growth at Fort Meade and the National Security Agency (NSA), headquarters for Cyber Command will also move here; raising the number of new jobs from

20,000 to 60,000. A number of neighboring counties including Prince George, Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Harford and Cecil will be affected along with Howard County.

Efforts to assist families in accessing support services are being provided through a new campaign by Howard County's Department of Citizen Services that will make it easier for individuals and families to find the support services they need. Funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, the campaign will assist families who are relocating to the area for BRAC. Howard County is the first jurisdiction in the nation to receive a BRAC grant to support its efforts to meet the human services needs of relocating families.

FINANCES

ACS Priorities

- The County must continue to implement every measure and mechanism at its disposal to "hold harmless" health and human service programs.
- Community Services Partnership grants should remain a critical County funding priority.
- Operations funding for the nonprofit community should be recognized and supported by government, private donors, businesses and philanthropic organizations.
- The County should pursue all available opportunities of funding, both federal and state, to support critical human services needs.

In alignment with Maryland Nonprofits, ACS supports the following statements:

- Government budget and fiscal policies must provide sufficient resources to equitably and adequately meet the responsibility of serving people and supporting the importance of public investment in community services and programs.
- Government operations and programs should be fair, effective, efficient and accountable.
- The system of raising adequate government revenues itself must be efficient and equitable.

Since 2007, Maryland has struggled with a chronic deficit that has gone as high as \$1.7 billion. The Maryland FY 2011 operating budget has been reduced one percent from the FY 2010 state budget for the first time in over 40 years. Revenue from slot machines is not expected until sometime in second half of FY 2011 and will likely be insufficient to correct budget shortfalls. For the first time in over a decade, income tax and sales tax revenue have continued to decline as a result of increased unemployment, decreased consumer spending and fewer real estate transactions; while costs for fuel, food and other good and services have risen.

With budget problems continuing for probably the next three year, it will be critical to determine the State contribution to county budgets. As more burden is placed on the counties, there will be fewer dollars for health and human services.

In Howard County, personal income tax revenue dropped 13.1% from March 2009 to March 2010 (*Howard County Economic Indicators, June 2010*). Retail sales tax revenue on items such as

furniture and appliances decreased 19% in this past year as have Planning & Zoning fees (-9%) (*Howard County Economic Indicators, June 2010*).

While Howard County retains its AAA bond rating and has been able to continue Community Service Partnerships (CSP) grants to non-profit service organizations, organizations have continued to feel the impact of cuts from Maryland and other funders. Items initially placed in the Budget such as improved reimbursement rates for community services workers are often the first to be cut when budget shortfalls arise. Many governmental and non-profit human services providers have not recovered from cuts to services and funding taken over the last 10 years in addition to years of “level” funding while costs and the demand for services grew. Once again, current cuts are now affecting our most vulnerable citizens. Primary health care providers are not being adequately reimbursed by Medicaid to cover their costs. Anecdotally, some physicians are not accepting Medicaid patients in their practices due to inadequate reimbursement.

Predictably, as the economy struggles, more and more individuals and families are forced to seek assistance from various entitlement and financial support programs because of loss of employment, insurance benefits and increasing costs.

Effective human services programs must be preserved and protected in order to meet the existing and growing needs of the most vulnerable citizens of Howard County. Budgets cannot be balanced “on the backs” of the underserved and poor citizens by reducing or eliminating critical human services programs.

With the exception of governmental grants including Community Service Partnerships and the Columbia Foundation, most funders support specific projects and services rather than overall operating costs making it difficult to maintain the organizational infrastructure necessary for growing service delivery needs.

HUMAN SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE

ACS Priorities

- Effective human services programs must be preserved and protected to meet the existing and growing needs of the most vulnerable citizens in Howard County.
- ACS supports the development and utilization of volunteer services among health and human service organizations to strengthen programs.
- Processes for developing the Howard County General Plan and Human Services Master Plan should be initiated.
- Mechanisms enabling the nonprofit community to be competitive with government and private enterprise to hire and retain qualified staff should be researched and implemented.

In the past 40 years, Howard County has developed a strong and comprehensive array of human services to meet the needs of its growing community. While there are county and state agencies

that provide services to address prevention of disease, mental health, substance abuse treatment, transportation, social, aging and children & youth services, a majority of providers are non-profit organizations that address specific issues such as family violence, disabilities, homelessness and housing, medical care, poverty solutions, and special populations.

Howard County government has provided support for a number of these agencies through the Community Service Partnership (CSP) grants administered by the Department of Citizen Services. Funding has increased, from previous administrations, over the last several years including implementation of the Human Services Master Plan for Howard County as well as the health care access initiative Healthy Howard; however, it has not been enough to meet the growing need.

For a number of years, non-profits received level funding from governmental grants while the costs of doing business were rising. As with any other business, non-profits experience increases in office rental and expenses, utilities, fuel, staff and programmatic costs. Unlike most businesses, they cannot raise their prices to offset cost increases because the majority of their clients can barely afford the current service fees. As a result, level funding is actually a decrease in funding creating budget shortfalls which require organizations to make difficult decisions in order to continue operations. Further, during economically difficult times, individual and corporate giving decreases reducing an organization's ability to successfully fundraise to fill the gap in operational costs.

This has resulted in a number of critical issues for Howard County's human services providers:

- Human services providers (both public and private) cannot pay industry standard salaries to attract and retain qualified personnel including counselors, clinical staff, instructors, support staff, etc.
- Governmental departments have endured employee furloughs the last two years further hindering their ability to provide services to the public.
- Many non-profits have been unable to give cost-of-living raises to staff while individual consumer costs are rising especially in the past year.
- Smaller human services providers (fewer than 25 employees) are unable to afford other employee benefits such as health insurance and employer retirement plans.

By contrast, the Howard County Public School System, the largest human services provider in the County, has received steady increases in its budget to accommodate more students, as well as cover regular cost increases. Staff has continued to get annual raises while other organizations must "continue to do more with less". Studies have shown that children learn best when their human services needs are met including food, housing, health care and secure family structure.

Human services providers are struggling to provide services to existing clients at the same time the economic downturn and migration growth are increasing the number of individuals and families needing services. These services are essential to providing the quality of life that Howard County is known for. (Howard County was recently named the second best place to live in the United States by Money Magazine.) It is critical that human service organizations take an active role in developing the ten year review and revision of the Howard County General Plan.

One issue to be considered is co-location of human services with other services at sites such as community centers.

The establishment and utilization of volunteer services is another mechanism to strengthen the functionality of human services organizations. In fact, organizations such as Neighbor Ride exclusively rely on volunteers to deliver economical transportation services to older adults in Howard County. If this service was offered by paid staff, it would be cost prohibitive for older adults. Volunteers in other organizations often perform functions such as reception, administrative and fundraising services that enhance organizational function.

According to the Independent Sector, the value of volunteer time in Maryland is \$21.83 per hour (*Independent Sector 2009 www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time*). In Howard County, volunteering is supported by the Volunteer Center Serving Howard County and the Association of Volunteer Administrators. Volunteerism provides opportunities for individuals to gain work experience and skills training that can be applied to future work situations. Organizations should be encouraged and supported to establish effective volunteer programs to expand their capacity to provide services.

However, volunteer programs are only as effective as the effort, resources and structure put into them. Successful volunteer programs, providing a positive and useful experience for both the organization and the volunteer, must have the structure in place to operate the program as well as evaluate the community effect. This requires trained volunteer coordinators and investment in recruitment, selection and ongoing training of volunteers.

As organizations strive to provide services effectively and efficiently, there has been an increase in the use of technology. The Healthy Howard Health Plan, for example, has utilized One-e-App, a web-based eligibility and enrollment system designed to expedite and simplify the application process for a range of public programs; to identify families and individuals eligible for public health insurance programs in addition to Healthy Howard. Other software applications being used by service organizations include SAIL used by DSS to deliver food stamp and other social service program applications; and SOAR which is voice over internet protocol (VoIP) to enhance communications. The use of technology to enhance operations should be encouraged and supported by funders.

Among non-profit organizations, there has been recent turnover in leadership positions and one organization has ceased operations due to a number of administrative issues. Frequently, new organizational leaders are pulled from the ranks of existing employees. Occasionally, leaders are recruited from outside the area. In either case, there must be leadership development to ensure that these new executives have appropriate training in management and fiscal matters as well as a comprehensive understanding of the community they serve.

Similarly, boards of directors must receive education in non-profit management and fiduciary responsibilities of the organizations they serve. Boards typically set policy and establish the mission and vision of the organization. It is imperative that they fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, the community at large must support the human services infrastructure. Howard County continues to be in the top five richest counties in the United States. Our wealthy community must be aware of critical human service needs and support the community philanthropically. Often, fund-raising and grant opportunities occur to support a new program or capital project for an organization. While this is important and needed, organizations have a critical need for ongoing operational funding from private donors, businesses and philanthropic organizations. The community at large must provide this support.

It is incumbent on the human services providers to ensure that programs are effective and meet the needs of the community.

Public and non-profit human service providers are struggling to hire and retain qualified staff. They are in competition with the private sector as well as surrounding jurisdictions that have higher salaries for key positions. An ACS study is underway from the Howard County Policy Analysis Center to identify the scope of the problem and make recommendation for solutions.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

ACS Priorities

- Legislation enabling the Downtown Columbia Housing Trust should be enacted for use as a possible future funding model for affordable housing.
- The County should support the work of the Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency and its priorities: Ending Homelessness, Ending Hunger, and Raising Income/Building Assets.

Over the past year, ACS actively facilitated the Full Spectrum Housing Coalition comprised of a number of affordable housing advocacy groups including the Committee to End Homelessness and Interfaith Housing Coalition. After several years of decline, the average price to purchase a home (single family detached and town houses) in the County increased 1% in 2010 from \$430,166 to \$434,450; the average condominium price of \$332,887 in 2009 decreased 14% to \$283,740 in 2010 (www.hceda.com *Economic Indicators June 2010*). A first time home buyer still needs an income of \$130,000 or 130% of Howard County median household income to purchase a home (*Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development*) indicating less than 40% of Howard County residents can afford to purchase a home for the first time.

Approximately 9,899 individuals (3.6% of Howard County's population) (*U.S. Census 2008 American Community Survey*) live at or below the federal poverty level (FPL) (\$22,050 for a family of four, 2010). There are 18% (18,273), of Howard County households earning less than \$50,000 per year or approximately 200% of FPL. Clearly, these households struggle to live in Howard County with housing costs as well as food, energy, child care, etc.

Table 4 reflects a significant increase in indicators for housing assistance. It should be noted that the 26% reduction in eviction prevention funding is a result of the Department of Housing and Community Development resuming responsibility of the rental assistance program previously managed by the Community Action Council.

Table 4

Housing Assistance	FY 2007 Workload Data	FY 2008 Workload Data	FY 2009 Workload Data	FY 2010 Workload Data	Cumulative Change %
Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8)	1,941 Active Files	735 vouchers; 1,206 on the waiting list	721 current vouchers 3,399 on waiting list	693 current vouchers, 3,987 on waiting list	Same
Public Housing	5,171 Active Files	55 units; 5,116 on waiting list	385 units 5,356 on waiting list		
MIHU			74 rented; 59 purchased 439 on waiting list		
Eviction Prevention	179 Grants-\$94,494	298 Grants - \$173,173	298 Grants - \$126,878	326 \$167,877	10% 56%

Source: Howard County Department of Housing & Community Development and Community Action Council, July 2010

In 2007 and 2008 the number of foreclosures in Howard County has been fairly consistent 674 and 775 respectively (*Howard County Civil Clerk of Court*). In 2009, total foreclosures rose to 1,408 almost double 2008 (*Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development www.mdhope.org*).

As part of its planning process, Howard County Department of Housing and Community Development (HCDHCD) studied affordable housing resources. Funding is primarily supported by the County’s transfer tax as well as capital projects, federal community development block grants (CDBG), rents and Housing Choice vouchers. Transfer taxes are affected by home sales which were reduced in the last two years. Between FY 2008 and FY 2009, transfer taxes fell by 22% or nearly \$4 million (www.hceda.com *Economic Indicators June 2009*). Transfer taxes were further reduced by \$182,000 (1.4%) between FY 2009 and FY2010 (www.hceda.com *Economic Indicators June 2010*). The Department also supports the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendation of creating an affordable housing trust fund for the county.

Significant impact on the availability of affordable housing stock could be made by enacting legislation enabling establishing the Downtown Columbia Housing Trust. This would provide funding for purchase and rehabilitation of affordable housing units.

A January 2010 survey found 133 people living in shelter or transitional programs and 88 people living outdoors, in cars or places not meant for human habitation. It’s difficult to estimate how many more people are precariously housed and at risk of homelessness (doubled up, living in motels, being evicted, paying high rents they can’t afford); indications are that many more people are unsheltered or at risk of losing housing than are in the homeless shelter system. The main homeless service providers, Grassroots and Bridges to Housing Stability, turned away

people for lack of space more 4,200 last year. This is a substantial increase (41% for two years) over 3,300 in 2009 and 2,500 in 2008. In the 2009-2010, school year, Howard County public schools recorded more than 400 students as not having a permanent address. There were more than 17,000 eviction filings in Howard County last year.

Risk factors for becoming homeless include:

- Chronically homeless: addictions, past trauma, mental illness
- Everyday folks: Loss of income, medical crisis, domestic dispute, overwhelming debt, unaffordable rent, poor money management.

Board to Promote Self Sufficiency

In 2009, Howard County Board to Promote Self-Sufficiency charged its Committee to End Homelessness to develop a Howard County Plan to End Homelessness. The Committee and more than 50 volunteers are researching the situation in Howard County and best practices in other communities. It has found that some communities have reduced homelessness using a two-part strategy:

- Housing First – Providing housing for people who are chronically homeless, recognizing that they are more likely to overcome the cause of their homelessness if relieved of the stress associated with lack of stable housing.
- Prevention -- Helping people who are at-risk to maintain their housing. Prevention is less costly than dealing with homelessness after it occurs, both in terms of money and human suffering.

Although much remains to be done, Committee efforts have already led to some applications of these best practices. The new Grassroots Day Resource Center has provided basic needs for over 500 mostly chronically homeless people in the past year, largely through the efforts of volunteers from 44 churches. Federal economic stimulus funds have been combined with local resource to establish a Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP).

In addition to preventing and ending homeless, the Board's focus includes ending hunger and raising income/building assets.

The Committee to End Hunger has four objectives:

- Promote Collaborative Leadership/Outreach to increase support of food assistance programs and educational outreach, strengthen linkages, provide technical assistance, engage in social justice and public policy advocacy and increase the number of farmers markets and community supported agriculture.
- Increase Access and Maximize Utilization through simplifying access to programs such as food stamps, WIC and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and unifying identification of children eligible for the Free and Reduced Meals program through the public schools.

- Increase Support and Funding through increased funding for the Food Bank, WIC, Summer Feeding program, partnership with Howard County Board of Education, new strategies to districts with high need and low resources and obtaining corporate funding
- Improve Health and Nutrition through increasing the use of health and nutrition programs, more nutritious school meal programs and encourage afterschool childcare providers to provide healthier snacks.

A third committee, Committee for Raising Income and Building Assets is considering a prior initiative, “Jobs on the Horizon” which is a publication which lists all community college resources which lead to employment for distribution. Other activities include working with the North Laurel Multi-Service Center to have staff inform clients of the opportunities and resources that are available. Many people qualify for educational subsidies to improve employment opportunities. Outreach locations for target populations are being explored; possibilities are the YMCA, libraries and Parks and Recreation. Other possibilities discussed were child care facilities, monthly meetings of Head Start families at CAC and the North Laurel Community College. Howard Community College will have advisors available in August to begin outreach.

HEALTH CARE

ACS Priorities

- Strategies should be developed to address health insurance reform and access to health care for all residents including enrollment, employer impact and state level policies.
- Support improved access to all health and behavioral health services including consumer education
- Affordable long-term care insurance should be available for all older adults.
- Continued access to all crisis intervention services should be ensured.

In 2010, Congress passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known as the health care reform law that will make affordable health care accessible to nearly half of those currently uninsured today by full implementation in 2014. Undocumented residents will still be unable to access any health care program putting their lives and economic stability at risk. In Howard County, approximately 20,000 individuals including adults and children are uninsured. The County uninsured rate of over seven percent (7%) is based on the U.S. Census 2008 population estimate for Howard County of 274,995. The rate was determined by a phone survey conducted for Howard County Health Department and does not include homeless persons, low income persons without telephones and undocumented immigrants (*Howard County Health Department (HCHD)*).

Maryland expanded Medicaid eligibility to include parents earning up to 116% FPL in FY 2008. Over 61,300 Marylanders, including an additional 1500 Howard Countians, have been enrolled in Medicaid as a result.

Medical Assistance Community Care	June 2007	June 2008	June 2009	May 2010	Percentage Change
	6,341	6,876	7,289	7,504	13% (two year increase)

Source: Howard County Department of Social Services, June 2010

As of April 2010, 22,471 Howard County residents were receiving Medicaid services including aging/disabled, Maryland Child Health Insurance Program (MCHP), families and children, individual adults, community and others. Since there are few Howard County providers accepting Medicaid reimbursement due to low rates, this essentially means that over 41,000 (15%) of Howard County residents currently have significant difficulty accessing health care.

A component of health care reform will be the availability of long term health care insurance. Under the federal plan, adults will be able to purchase long term care insurance for approximately \$120 per month that will provide a \$50 per day benefit to cover the cost of long term care. This would provide an annual benefit of \$18,250 versus the current cost of long term care in the Baltimore area which averages \$36,000 - \$92,000 depending on location of care (*Genworth Financial, www.genworth.com.*). While the federal program will offer this optional coverage, it is woefully short in terms of meeting actual costs. Efforts must be made to educate all adults on the importance of having appropriate long term care insurance coverage.

Prior to the passage of federal health care reform, the Howard County Health Department, in collaboration with the Horizon Foundation, Howard County General Hospital and Howard County Government, initiated a health care access program. The Healthy Howard Health Plan provides access to health services for those Howard County residents not qualifying for or unable to afford other insurance programs. The program not only provides access to a full array of health care, it also provides a wellness program, with counseling, that promotes healthy behaviors among its participants.

Since its inception, it has served over 900 individuals who are between 117 – 300% of the federal poverty level (Healthy Howard 7/16/2010). Further, it has helped to identify and enroll over 2,500 residents, mostly children, eligible for other insurance programs such as Maryland Children’s Health Insurance program (MCHP) and the Primary Adult Health Care program (PAC). While Healthy Howard has continued to receive a \$500,000 grant from the County, other funding has been significantly reduced at a time when requests for services are increasing.

Other primary health care access issues include (*HCHD, 2009*):

- Increase in costs of insurance premiums for persons over age 50 which especially impacts small business and non-profit organizations.
- Decrease in primary care physicians accepting insurance coverage presumably in part due to low reimbursement rates that do not cover physicians’ costs of providing services. Some

primary care physicians need to see six patients per hour to meet expenses creating provider burn-out and dissatisfaction as well as reduced time with a patient.

- Reduced access to primary care for older adults with more physicians limiting the number of Medicare patients they treat due to low reimbursement rates (<http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/722925>).
- Among the growing immigrant population, there are additional barriers including lack of basic literacy in primary language as well as language and cultural competency training for providers.
- Less than 10% of older adults have coverage for long term care (Long Term Care Insurance) for nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc. These services are not covered by Medicare.

Behavioral Health Care

The Howard County Mental Health Authority (HCMHA) which provides services for the public mental health program, 11.5 million in FY 09 on fee for service (managed care) outpatient, day and residential programs, in-patient hospitalization and Residential Treatment Center (RTC) placements for adolescents and supported employment (vocational services) to 2255 individuals in these services; in FY 2009; an increase of 6.6% over FY 2008 on top of a 4.9% increase over FY 2007. (HCMHA, July 2010).

The breakdown by age group is as follows:

11.1% increase for children between the ages of 6 to 12;

1.3% increase for transitional age youth (ages 18 to 21);

8.7% increase for adults between ages 22-64; and

8.3% increase for elderly ages 65 and over.

Two age groups had decreases: early child (0-5) was -1.6% and adolescents (13-17) was -1.4%

In addition to the 11.5 million for the fee for service program, HCMHA managed 2.8 million in various grant funded services such as the Mobile Crisis Team (MCT), Grassroots Hotline, staff person at the Detention Center, part-time Psycho-geriatric Coordinator, support to families through National Alliance for Mental Illness, Howard County (NAMI) and consumers including funding to operate the Wellness and Recovery center and case management services. HCMHA has a grant to cover pharmacy and laboratory costs for a limited population of eligible uninsured residents, as well as security deposits and rent for individuals in the public mental health system that are at risk of losing their housing.

There are 106 beds in HCMHA residential program and funding from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to operate 10 Shelter Plus care beds providing permanent housing through rental subsidies for individuals who have a mental illness and are homeless.

WORK SUPPORT

ACS Priorities

- Job opportunities should be stimulated throughout the County, but particularly for the 19,000

county households with incomes at or below \$50,000

- Additional training programs and qualified educators should be developed to meet the County's growing need for professional, entry level and service workers.
- Support an increase in available qualified child care providers through training and small business development assistance.
- The Howard County Transportation Development Plan five-year plan should be implemented.

Job Opportunities

For the last two years, there has been an increase in the unemployment rate in Howard County to 5.5% for the current fiscal year. There has been some job loss among the County's professionals, mainly in the retail and financial industries; the significant problem is hiring and retaining employment for entry and service level workers.

Employment is a critical determinant of a family's sustainability during any economic downturn. In Howard County, special concern is directed to families with children at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Limit (FPL); 18% (18,273) of Howard County households earning less than \$50,000 per year. These families struggle with housing, transportation, healthy nutrition, child care and access to health care. They need employability and enhanced work skills to seek, retain and advance in the employment world.

Specific skills needed include language, literacy and translation skills, skills specific to trade positions including carpentry, plumbing, auto mechanics, electrical work, food and hospitality services, basic computer skills. There will also be an anticipated increase in other jobs areas including child care, health care, public safety and education.

Specific areas of needed employment skills include:

- Health Care
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM)
- Informatics
- Sustainable Design
- Green Technology
- Language and Translation Skills (both upper and entry level)
- Early Childhood Business Management and education (Child Care)
- Human Services (direct line workers and counselors)

Public and private educational providers struggle to provide needed educational and training programs, yet are hampered by insufficient qualified instructors and space to conduct the training programs. Additional training programs are needed to meet the County's growing need for professional, entry level and service workers.

Howard County's unemployed and employers benefit from the Howard County Office of Workforce Development. In partnership with Maryland's Department of Labor Licensing and

Regulations Division of Workforce Development, the Office provides a comprehensive array of services that include tools and resources necessary to help businesses and job seekers remain competitive in today's workforce and achieve their employment goals. It assists companies and individuals ranging from professional, technical and managerial to entry level

(w.co.ho.md.us/doa/doa_workforce_development.htm). Services include skills training, job interview and resume assistance and employee/employer matches.

Child Care

In Howard County, child care is provided through both child care centers and family day care providers. Capacity is dependent on age group, space and the number of qualified staff. Currently, there is available capacity for two – five year olds and a shortage of school age child care (before and after programs). There is also a shortage of infant care with high cost and small staff/infant ratios. A critical factor in the availability of child care is the quality of the care being provided. It is important for both parent and child that there be an appropriate curriculum that stimulates learning and development among infants and young children. While there may be a surplus of available child care “slots”, it is important that the care be of high quality rather than just a “parking lot” for children while parents are working.

Transportation

Transportation persists as a major barrier for special populations (older adults and disabled) and low income groups without their own transportation despite an increase in both fixed route and paratransit (HT Rides) ridership. Beginning July 1, 2010, the county decided to scale back service, eliminating trips that are deemed to be non-essential. This includes trips for shopping, including groceries, social outings and other non-medical appointments. Effective July 1, 2010, other cuts to HT Ride include ceasing reduced fares (\$5 per round trip) and has restricted visits outside the county. The county will save about \$140,000 annually.

Workers in lower economic groups continue to struggle to use public transportation for access to employment. Older adults continue to cite transportation as an access barrier to services and well as social and recreational activities (*Howard County Office on Aging, February 2009*). The Health Department reports that transportation is a major barrier for their patients as some travel four hours by bus to keep an appointment (*Howard County Health Department, March 2009*).

Howard Transit currently has nine bus routes serving Columbia, Ellicott City, Savage/North Laurel, Jessup, Elkridge and Clarksville. The most prevalent destinations are major employers, educational institutions (high schools, colleges), medical facilities, human service agencies and shopping centers (*Howard County TDP, 2008*).

The Howard County Transportation Development Plan (TDP) was completed in 2009. Implementation of the Howard County TDP five year short term plan would result in a significant improvement in the quality and coverage of transit services in the County, including the following key changes (*Howard County TDP 2009*) :

Frequency Improvements:

- Achieving thirty minute headways during peak and midday hours on various routes

Expanded Coverage:

- Including BRAC commuter service and linkages with MARC

Town Center:

- New higher-frequency transit services linking the Town Center to much of the rest of Howard County and development of a new transit center in downtown Columbia.

Paratransit:

- Expand to address the growth in the population using this service through a possible taxi subsidy program, travel training, and policy and management changes to manage demand, improve service, and better utilize these resources.

EDUCATION

ACS Priorities

- Advocate for services within the Howard County School System budget that support families with incomes below \$50,000 including Pupil Personnel Workers, Health Services after school programs, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) etc.

The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) has been able to keep pace with growth in student population and attendant staffing. In FY 2010, the approved HCPSS budget increased by one percent combined for state and county funding. In FY 2011, their budget increased by 8% or \$19.5 million; 6.4% of that increase will come from the state (www.hcpss.org), FY 2010 and FY 2011).

A major concern among human services providers are the additional supportive services needed by students and families living at or below a household income of \$50,000. Approximately 9% of female householders with children less than 18 years of age in Howard County live below the federal poverty level (U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2008). Students with limited resources need other assistance besides instructional services. These children benefit from pupil personnel and health services as well as ESOL and career academies which provide technical training for job skills and workforce development.

Pupil Personnel Services includes programs to improve student attendance and to solve pupil problems involving the home, school, and community. While the overall budget has increased, funding for pupil personnel services dipped slightly in FY 2010 and had a modest increase in FY 2011. Health Services includes staff for school health rooms, maintaining student health records, identifying health problems, enforcing immunization laws, and providing other services. Health Services experienced slight increases in funding for both FY 2010 and FY 2011. For the most part, increases in these areas have covered increased technology user costs.

Career academies provide opportunity for students to learn specific skills in the areas of Arts, Media, and Communication; Business, Management and Finance; Construction and Development; Consumer Services, Hospitality, and Tourism; Health and Biosciences; Human Resource Services; Information Technology; Manufacturing, Engineering, and Technology; Transportation Technologies; and Career Research and Development. This training is vital for securing well paying sustainable jobs in a variety of industries. They ensure that students receive the support and knowledge necessary for life success in securing and retaining employment and long term financial viability.