

## Understanding Health-Resource Needs to Mitigate Barriers Toward Healthy Lifestyles in Rural Communities

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding the specific resources that support the ability to live a healthy lifestyle in rural communities can help to improve future interventions and decrease the prevalence of chronic diseases. Though, the research discussing the perceived health-related barriers prevalent in rural communities is limited. **PURPOSE:** To evaluate perspectives of rural adults on the most influential health-related resources needed to improve healthy behaviors throughout rural communities in Texas, with the intent to further help meet the immediate health needs of the communities. This evaluation was a part of a statewide project, *Community Conversations on Health*, in partnership with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). **METHODS:** A qualitative analysis was conducted, which included 35 dyadic interviews and 104 focus groups to assess perceived, local resources needed to improve the adoption and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle, including physical activities and behavior, as well as chronic disease prevention and maintenance. All interviews and focus groups took place in their respective community settings (e.g., local church). Participants provided audible feedback in discussion of the original and probing questions, which was recorded via a handheld recorder. The transcripts were transcribed through NVivo14 before content analysis was completed. A thematic analysis methodology was utilized to identify key themes to further guide program and resource interventions. **RESULTS:** Preliminary results were analyzed from eight rural communities within five counties across Texas. Data included 51 responses from six dyadic interviews and 12 focus groups and revealed six themes that were identified as health-related resource needs including: (1) increased affordability for screenings and exercise facilities, (2) improved transportation to be able to access healthcare, (3) additional exercise facilities, (4) additional health education on mental health/chronic illnesses/nutrition, (5) social support to promote healthy lifestyles, and (6) increased access to specialty medical care for chronic illness such as cancer and diabetes. The lack of transportation and health education were identified as primary barriers in living a healthy lifestyle due to a lack of understanding regarding chronic illnesses and best nutrition choices as well as lacking the means to access the information. **CONCLUSION:** The current evaluation reveals the variety of health-related resource needs within rural communities, and further qualitative research is needed to best identify barriers, which hinder the adoption and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle – as well as innovative, sustainable, and replicable educational approaches to meet those needs of diverse, rural communities across the state of Texas.



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