

# 1. Community Summary

For the purposes of this Assessment, the Fort Smith Community is made up of Sebastian, Crawford and Franklin counties in Arkansas and Le Flore, Latimer, Haskell and Sequoyah counties in Oklahoma.

## **Sebastian County**

### Fort Smith

Sebastian County, located in the West Central part of Arkansas, was established on January 6, 1851<sup>1</sup>. Fort Smith is the hub of a diverse economy, a rich history and also the second largest city in Arkansas. The Fort Smith Symphony is proud to boast its success as being Arkansas' oldest symphony orchestra and the Fort Smith Little Theatre as the state's oldest continuously-running volunteer theatre. Steeped in Old West lore, from books and film like *True Grit*, to some colorful characters like Belle Starr, Judge Isaac C. Parker and U.S. Deputy Marshal Bass Reeves, Fort Smith will be the future home to the U.S. Deputy Marshal's Museum.

The U.S. Army established the Fort Smith military outpost in 1817 and to this day operates an active military presence, with the Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center, operated by the Arkansas National Guard.

Home to the University of Arkansas Fort Smith (UAFS) since 1928, the university continues to provide unique and ever expanding educational opportunities to its community. Fort Smith offers a water park as well as miles of scenic bike and walking trails and two baseball fields and a softball field. There are two 300+ bed acute care hospitals located in Fort Smith, with Mercy Hospital offering a Level 3 twenty-five bed Neonatal Intensive Care Unit<sup>2</sup>.

## **Crawford County**

In 1820, Crawford County was established and features rugged terrain from the Ozark Mountains in the northern half to rolling farmlands, forested ridges, isolated mountains, and lakes in the southern half. The county seat is Van Buren. The main economic base of the county is agriculture and affiliated industries including soybeans, fruit and

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<sup>1</sup> Sebastian County <http://www.sebastiancountyar.gov/>

<sup>2</sup> City of Fort Smith <http://www.fortsmithar.gov/>

vegetables, beef cattle, and poultry.

The Crawford County Courthouse is listed in the National Historic Register and is thought to be the oldest active county courthouse west of the Mississippi River. People are attracted to historic downtown Van Buren that has six blocks of restored architecture, including arts, crafts, and antique shops<sup>3</sup>.

## **Franklin County**

### Ozark

On December 19, 1837, Franklin County was formed and named for Benjamin Franklin. The landscape of Franklin County is rugged terrain in the northern half, and rolling farmlands, forested ridges, and isolated mountains in the south. The county claims the first oil strike in Arkansas and sits on vast fields of coal, clay, iron, shale and other minerals; however agriculture is still the main basis of its economy. Altus, AR has grown to be the winemaking capital in Arkansas<sup>4</sup>.

Ozark represents small-town living surrounded by mountains, rivers, forests and lakes. Ozark Lake and the Arkansas River provide plenty of fishing opportunities. Aux Arc Park stretches along the river providing a playground, campsites, boat launching ramps and other facilities for the outdoor enthusiast.

Residents of Ozark have access to Mercy Hospital Ozark, a 25-bed general medical and surgical critical access hospital<sup>5</sup>.

## **Haskell County**

Haskell County was created in 1907 and is located in southeastern Oklahoma. The Sans Bois Mountains are situated in the southern portion of the county. The county was named after Charles N. Haskell, Oklahoma's first governor and member of the Oklahoma Constitutional Convention. The Robert S. Kerr Reservoir, located in the east, and Lake Eufaula in the west, has greatly benefitted the county, especially the town of Keota, making it a shipping point and attracting industry<sup>6</sup>.

## **Latimer County**

Latimer County is located in the southeastern part of Oklahoma and was created at statehood in 1907. The county was named for J.S. Latimer, the Representative to the

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<sup>3</sup> Crawford County <http://www.crawford-county.org>

<sup>4</sup> Franklin County <http://local.arkansas.gov/local.php?agency=Franklin%20County>

<sup>5</sup> Ozark, AR <http://www.arkansas.com/places-to-go/cities-and-towns/city-detail.aspx?city=Ozark>

<sup>6</sup> Haskell County <http://www.okgenweb.org/~okhaskel/>

Constitutional Congress. Wilburton is the county seat. By 1912, the county's 27 coal mines were producing 3,000 tons per day making the industry the basis of its economy. The Great Depression was the onset, however, of the mining industry collapsing. After the collapse of the coal industry, the main industries are cattle, lumber and production of oil and gas<sup>7</sup>.

## Le Flore County

Le Flore County is located along the eastern border of Oklahoma. It was named in honor of the Choctaw family, Le Flore. The county seat is in Poteau. The Ouachita National Forest covers much of the southern part of the county. At the time of Robert S. Kerr's death, his family donated his ranch home to the state. The Kerr Conference Center and Museum was opened in 1978. The Kerr Center for Sustainable Agriculture and the Overstreet-Kerry Historical Farm are also located in the county. Since 1980, the Overstreet farmhouse has been on the National Register of Historic Places. Coal, limestone, sand and gravel, and natural gas can be found in Le Flore County. Natural gas is confined to the northern half of the county, with the Poteau Field being the largest. Carl Albert State College operates in Poteau, OK<sup>8</sup>.

## Sequoyah County

Sequoyah County is located in extreme eastern Oklahoma, named for the Sequoyah District of the Cherokee Nation and for George Guess who invented an alphabet that brought literacy to the Cherokee. To the north of Sequoyah County is the Ozark Plateau and the Ouachita Mountains region to the south. Sequoyah County was part of Lovely's Purchase, a controversial acquisition of territory in 1816 from the Osage for Arkansas Cherokees. Grain production, cattle, and soybeans have remained the foundation of the economy. Sequoyah County proudly claims prominent residents such as Charles Arthur "Pretty Boy" Floyd, country recording artist Cal Smith, and Bryant "Big Country" Reeves, All-American basketball player for Oklahoma State University.

By the late twentieth century, the health care industry was growing, and jobs in nearby Fort Smith accounted for much of the county's income. In 2000 the county's three leading industries were health care (25.9 percent), retail trade (18.5 percent), and accommodation and food services (16.5 percent)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Latimer County <http://www.okgenweb.org/~oklatime/>

<sup>8</sup> Le Flore County <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LE007>

<sup>9</sup> Sequoyah County <http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=SE022>

# Ozarks Health Commission

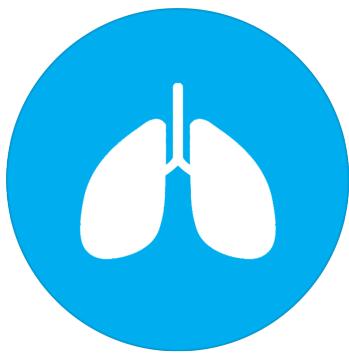
Recognizing the value of assessing and acting together on local health issues, key players from local hospital systems, public health entities, behavioral health systems and others formed a working group to begin the task of a regional health assessment.

This group grew under the umbrella of the local Ozarks Health Commission (OHC). This first-time collaboration of this size in the area spans four states—Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Kansas—51 counties and four hospital systems. This footprint will be referred to throughout the report as the OHC Region, a map of which can be found in the Executive Summary.

This assessment, along with the resulting implementation plan, will allow decision-makers to have a more holistic and up-to-date picture with which to strategically address community health concerns in their own jurisdictions. This report outlines priorities and data for the Springfield Community—all other Communities' reports can be found at [ozarkshealthcommission.org](http://ozarkshealthcommission.org).

## Primary Health Needs Identified

After careful analysis of the community health data, multiple health needs were identified and the following priorities were selected:



### Lung Disease

Lung disease continues to impact the health and wellness of too many in our community.



### Cardiovascular Disease

As a leading cause of death, cardiovascular disease is wreaking havoc on our community.



### Mental Health

Mental health issues are a result of a multitude of factors and cause a magnitude of negative effects to our community.

## Common Threads

Throughout this assessment, common threads often emerged in discussion around data and findings. While not explicitly identified as priority health issues, the Ozarks Health Commission recognizes the importance of highlighting the impact of these common threads on the health issues in the report.

In studying these common threads, the Ozarks Health Commission used the Socioecological Model<sup>10</sup> as a framework to examine the impact on health issues. The Socioecological Model recognizes a wide range of factors working together to impact health and includes influences at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, community, and policy levels. Each of these common threads can impact health issues at levels throughout the model, and as such, community partners targeting to affect the common threads should consider action throughout the spectrum of the model.

Throughout the common threads section, the Socioecological Model will be referenced to suggest possible strategies and provide context.



<sup>10</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html>

<sup>11</sup> Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, <http://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/prevention-chronic-care/resources/clinical-community-relationships-measures-atlas/ccrm-atlas3.html>



## Access to Appropriate Care

**The understanding of and the ability to access appropriate care and treatment is critical to improve and maintain quality of life while reducing the burden of disease.**

Accessing healthcare has always been a struggle within our country, and has long been recognized as an issue, especially for vulnerable populations. Out of this need, safety net providers, such as Federally Qualified Health Centers and Rural Health Clinics, have arisen. Additionally, various federal and state programs have been implemented and changed to provide increased access to care: most notably Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act. Despite numerous efforts, access to appropriate health care remains a concern for many. Currently, 20.8% of Americans do not have adequate access to healthcare services. The OHC Region also faces challenges to accessing care, with 25.2%, an estimated 576,000 people, without health insurance. Those without care face obvious health challenges since they are not as able to adequately treat acute issues or chronic diseases, resulting in further exacerbation of the condition, reducing quality of life and resulting in early death.<sup>12</sup>

Accessing care can be a multi-faceted and complex challenge that spans all diseases and conditions and is closely connected with each of the seven assessed health issues. Examining some of the community health data more closely, there is concerning data within the OHC Region. The rate of preventable hospital events that are considered to be ambulatory care sensitive in the OHC Region is 67.7 per 1,000 Medicare enrollees, compared with a national rate of 59.2. There are fewer care physicians in the OHC Region: 63.6 per 100,000, compared to the nation's rate of 74.5. Most alarming is the percent of people living in a designated Health Professional Shortage Area, which is 60.5%, compared to 34.1% of the national population. This concern is further supported by the community survey and focus groups that were conducted. The survey demonstrated many individuals face challenges with accessing care and the cost of health care, which suggests a challenge with being uninsured or underinsured. Of the nine community focus groups, access to care was identified as one of the emergent themes in five of the Communities.

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/Access-to-Health-Services>

The effect of a lack of access results in significant cost to both the individuals and communities. A 2014, Kaiser Family Foundation Report sums up the impact: "In 2013, the cost of 'uncompensated care' provided to uninsured individuals was \$84.9 billion. Uncompensated care includes health care services without a direct source of payment. In addition, people who are uninsured paid an additional \$25.8 billion out-of-pocket for their care."<sup>13</sup> Since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, one of the four states within the assessment, Arkansas, has expanded Medicaid. In the first few years, 275,000 estimated people now have insurance coverage, reducing the uninsured rate by 49%.<sup>14</sup> The other three states, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma have not expanded Medicaid, leaving thousands without viable options for health insurance. With a Medicaid expansion, Kansas would provide coverage to an estimated additional 200,000 individuals, Missouri to 452,000 individuals and Oklahoma to 348,000.<sup>15</sup> By expanding coverage, people have the ability to not delay treatment and prevent or mitigate the effects of disease through treatment.

While having access to care is vital to improving treatment and health for people, accessing appropriate care is equally important. This certainly includes ensuring individuals have a plan to cover the cost of care and making sure that there is appropriate provider coverage in communities; however, another important component is changing the culture to access care appropriately. Too many times individuals are using the emergency department for non-emergent issues, as is shown in the primary hospital data. While everyone can use the emergency department for non-emergent issues, the emergency departments are the least efficient and effective treatment options because the facility and staff are designed to treat emergent health needs.

Improving access to appropriate care will require changes at multiple levels of influence, including individual, community, organizational and policy levels, as indicated by the Socioecological Model. Efforts to address each assessed health issue should a) focus on improving the systems around the individual to improve health and access to appropriate care, and b) work to modify the way that individuals consume health services to ensure care is effective and efficient.

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<sup>13</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, <http://kff.org/uninsured/report/uncompensated-care-for-the-uninsured-in-2013-a-detailed-examination/>

<sup>14</sup> Health Insurance.org, <https://www.healthinsurance.org/medicaid/>

<sup>15</sup> Health Insurance.org, <https://www.healthinsurance.org/medicaid/>



## Social Determinants of Health

**The interconnectedness of health, education, economic viability, housing and quality of life impact an individual, family and community's ability to thrive.**

Throughout the world, our country and in our own communities, factors exist that affect the ability of people to live a life that provides the best opportunity to be healthy. Health, as defined by the World Health Organization, can be considered a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In considering the interconnectedness of the multitude of factors that affect health for people, social determinants of health are often described. The Institute of Medicine suggests the following description for:

*Social determinants of health are conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. Conditions (e.g., social, economic, and physical) in these various environments and settings (e.g., school, church, workplace, and neighborhood) have been referred to as "place."*

<sup>16</sup> *In addition to the more material attributes of "place," the patterns of social engagement and sense of security and well-being are also affected by where people live. Resources that enhance quality of life can have a significant influence on population health outcomes. Examples of these resources include safe and affordable housing, access to education, public safety, availability of healthy foods, local emergency/health services, and environments free of life-threatening toxins.*

Improvements in population health may be achieved by assessing, understanding and addressing root causes of poor health which can often be traced to include the social determinants of health. This assessment analyzed the following social determinants of health:

- Unemployment
- Income level
- Poverty rate
- Population receiving SNAP benefits
- Population on Medicaid

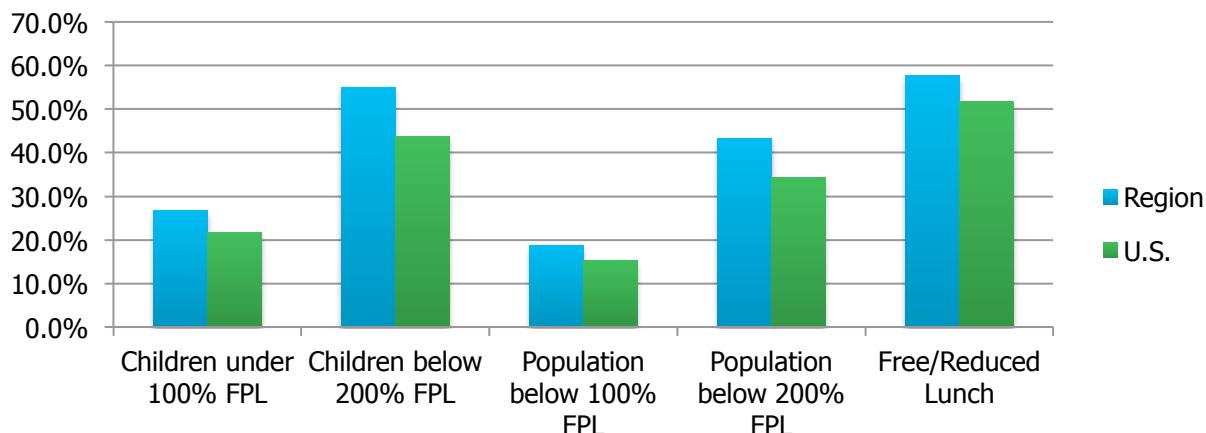
<sup>16</sup> Gornick, Marian E., "Disparities in Health Care: Methods for Studying the Effects of Race, Ethnicity, and SES on Access, Use, and Quality of health care", <http://www.iom.edu/~media/Files/Activity%20Files/Quality/NHDRGuidance/DisparitiesGornick.pdf>

- Free and reduced lunch rate
- Education level

Although there are other factors that affect health, these are some of the most widely used and accepted indicators of determining the health of a person. Achieving a state of health and desired quality of life requires economic stability, social and community connection, safe living arrangements, access to quality and appropriate health care and much more. Just like many aspects of life that deal with resource availability, a good state of health is often associated with more readily available resources. Poor health or a lack of health affects each and every one of us by way of personal associations and community health achievement, which ultimately affects our individual and community ability to thrive.

A good example of this is the employment sector. Employers struggle with recruiting and retaining individuals to work decent-waged jobs in some scenarios because potential employees struggle with unreliable transportation or health concerns caused by poor living conditions or lack of access to healthy foods. Communities can struggle to attract businesses that pay good wages and offer good jobs because employers do not want to reside in a place where the population is burdened by higher-than-average prevalence of poor health indicators such as high rates of tobacco usage, obesity, heart disease and lung disease. Businesses are attracted to communities where neighborhoods thrive, educational attainment is high and employees are healthy and thriving—and therefore not a threat to the bottom line due to high health care costs as a result of preventable illness. The unemployment rate across the OHC Region (5.4%) varies by county, from 4.2% in Washington County, AR to 8.7% in Taney County, MO.

In addition to employment, the OHC Region struggles with a number of other indicators used to describe social determinants of health. As indicated by the chart below, poverty is higher in the OHC Region than across the U.S. Not shown in the chart, but worth noting, is that 27.9% of families earn more than \$75,000 per year, which is much lower than the country (42.8%). Also, of those 25 years of age and older, 15.3% in the OHC Region have not received a high school diploma or equivalent, which is higher than the U.S. (14.0%).



Social determinants of health tell us a story about the way that people live and, by extension, how their lives affect the community. Ultimately, where we live, where we work and our educational attainment level have huge impacts on the quality and length of our lives. Communities that consider the health impacts of policy decisions can make a positive impact on the social determinants of health.



## Tobacco Use

**High prevalence in tobacco use results in some of the biggest health concerns related to lung disease, cardiovascular disease and mental health. Interventions need to range from individual behavior change to policy change.**

Awareness regarding the ill-health effects of tobacco use has grown significantly since the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health published in 1964. The report laid the foundation for tobacco control efforts in the United States. However, as the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, there is still a great deal of work to be done.

According to the most recent Surgeon General's report published in 2014, smoking causes 87% of all lung cancer deaths, 32% of deaths due to coronary heart disease, and is responsible for 79% of all cases of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Nationally, 18% of adults are tobacco users. Within the OHC Region, 23% of residents use tobacco. Additionally, the prevalence in each of the nine communities identified in this report is higher than the national average. Therefore, in order to reduce the threat

of death and poor quality of life among residents in the OHC Region, it is imperative that efforts are taken to reduce tobacco use.

While the evidence reveals that tobacco use can lead to complex physiological health issues, it can also complicate existing health issues. Those dealing with mental illness may smoke to curtail the severity of their mental health symptoms. According to the most recently published Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) vital sign report on smoking among adults with mental illness, 36% of adults with mental illness were current smokers, which is much higher than those without a mental illness (21%). Additionally, 48% of people with a mental illness living below the poverty level smoke cigarettes<sup>17</sup>.

Although data does not currently exist for the OHC Region regarding tobacco use among adults with mental illness, it is safe to assume that smoking in this population is significantly high considering the high rates of depression (17.5% compared to 15.5% nationally) and poverty (18.6% compared to 15% nationally) in the region. People with mental illness may not have access to tobacco cessation services and may smoke more frequently than the general population. Therefore, it is important to monitor tobacco use across all subpopulations, and use evidence-based interventions at multiple levels of influence.

According to the Socioecological Model, there are multiple levels of influence that affect a person's behavior. The levels of influence include individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and public policy. Interventions targeting the individual level include raising awareness about the harms of first, second and third-hand smoke, providing tobacco cessation classes and offering various modes of counseling to stay tobacco-free. Tobacco cessation classes may also serve as an interpersonal intervention because of the social support offered in a group setting. Organizational interventions may include tobacco-free workplace policies, as well as insurance companies increasing rates for tobacco users. At the community level, successful strategies include changing cultural norms through high-powered, cohesive and consistent media campaigns. Finally, policy-level interventions have the greatest impact. Policy advocacy at the local, states and national levels may include increasing tobacco tax, improving warning labels on tobacco products, implementing indoor air ordinances, regulating smoking in schools and implementing comprehensive tobacco control programs.

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<sup>17</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
[http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6205a2.htm?s\\_cid=mm6205a2\\_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6205a2.htm?s_cid=mm6205a2_w)



## Physical Activity and Nutrition

**Good nutrition, regular physical activity and a healthy body size are important in maintaining health and well-being and for preventing health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer.**

Obesity continues to be a growing issue for the physical and economic health of our nation. The CDC reports that obesity rates in America have increased from 35% in 2011-2012 to 38% in 2013-2014. Currently, 27.1% of adults are obese, nationally. Within the OHC Region, 31.8% of adults are obese. The ramifications for this can be severe. Obesity contributes to the exacerbation of many chronic conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. According to the CDC, chronic diseases are responsible for 7 out of 10 deaths each year and accounts for 86% of our nation's health care costs. The trending increase can be attributed to the American lifestyle, with most Americans eating more and moving less.

Regular physical activity improves overall health and well-being and reduces the risk of chronic diseases and obesity. More than 80% of adults and adolescents do not meet the guidelines for physical activity. People who are physically active tend to live longer and have lower risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression and cancer. Physical activity can also help with weight control, and inactive adults have a higher risk for premature death.

Poor diets are not only a risk factor for obesity, but for other chronic diseases as well. For example, diets high in added sugar lead to health issues such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. High dietary fat intake is a risk factor for the development of high blood lipid levels, and high dietary salt intake is a risk factor for the development of high blood pressure. In turn, high blood lipid levels and high blood pressure are significant risk factors for cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases. Fewer than 1 in 3 adults, and an even lower proportion of adolescents, eat the recommended amount of vegetables each day.

As the Socioecological Model describes, there are multiple levels of influence that affect a person's behavior. Interventions targeting the individual level include raising awareness about the harms of obesity, proper nutrition and the importance of regular physical activity. Exercise and nutrition classes may also serve as an interpersonal intervention because of the social support offered in a group setting. Organizational interventions may include healthy food policies, such as vending machine policies. At the community level, successful strategies include changing cultural norms through a

pedestrian-friendly community that encourages walking and biking to essential resources and addressing food access concerns. Finally, policy level interventions have the greatest impact. Policy advocacy at the local, states and national levels may include increasing sugary beverage tax, nutrition labeling, regulating food advertisement, regulating nutrition and physical activity policies in schools and implementing complete streets ordinances or bicycle and pedestrian friendly policies.



## Mental Health

**Mental health is inextricably linked to physical health. Poor mental health can have an impact on behaviors that result in poor physical health.**

The linkages between mental health conditions and physical health are still not totally understood. It is tempting to make clear distinctions between the body and the mind, but evidence continues to emerge that we should not ignore this interconnectedness and that we must acknowledge that the two cannot be thought of as separate. We must also acknowledge that there is not a simple model that explains this relationship. Metaphorically, we cannot answer which comes first, the chicken or the egg. Poor physical health can lead to poor mental health. Conversely, poor mental health can contribute to behaviors that increase one's risk for chronic health conditions.

Mental health is a common thread in many chronic health conditions. Depression has been linked to higher rates of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Additionally, persons with depression tend to engage in more risk behaviors for these diseases—such as smoking, poor diet or lack of exercise—than persons without depression.<sup>18</sup> A 2006 study suggests that 80% of those diagnosed with schizophrenia use tobacco products.<sup>19</sup> A growing body of evidence suggests that the lack of social connectedness, particularly in older adults, contributes to poor health outcomes.

While the relationship between mental health and physical health is becoming clearer, those connections remain murky and solutions to treating the mind and body together remain elusive. But what is becoming clear is that we can no longer largely rely on providing treatment for mental health issues through our emergency departments and our criminal justice system. Mental health issues need to be addressed before crisis is reached. Community leaders need to evaluate the causes of mental illness and take

<sup>18</sup> Katon WJ., "Clinical and health services relationships between major depression, depressive symptoms, and general medical illness", <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12893098>

<sup>19</sup> Keltner, Norman L.; Grant, Joan S., Perspectives in Psychiatric Care - "Smoke, Smoke, Smoke That Cigarette", <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1744-6163.2006.00085.x/abstract>

preventive measures to ensure that people live in an environment that contributes to stability of body and mind.