Where Transportation and Health Care Meet

Adequate, accessible, and affordable transportation and healthcare are crucial to maintaining a healthy population. In order to be able to access health care, one must have reliable transportation for regular appointments and in emergency situations. There are several options available in the state of Florida when it comes to free and reduced cost health clinics and low cost forms of transportation. Through the course of 100+ hours of work, I have compiled a list of this information for each of the 67 counties in the state of Florida. Strengths and limitations in both healthcare and transportation options as well as struggles in finding information were explored and are discussed below.

As seen in table A below, affordable health care options in Florida can be quite limited. This table focuses on the five counties with the highest population and the five with the least to offer a glimpse into the condition for all 67 counties. Limitations are especially noticeable in the counties with the highest population levels such as Broward and Palm Beach counties. In these counties each free or reduced cost clinic would need to accommodate 39,283 and 14,133 patients respectively per year. These numbers represent the poor population of each county as defined by the US Census Bureau divided by the amount of clinics found in each county. However, more people may be utilizing these clinics as many offer services on a sliding fee scale and others accept patients living at up to 200% of the federal poverty level. To put this into perspective, the poverty threshold for a family of four (including two children below age 18) in 2015 was $24,036, and 200% of this would be $48,072 (Poverty Thresholds). As one can see, this greatly widens the pool of potential patients, increasing the strain on clinics. According to Alison Richie of Medical Economics, "family physicians and general practitioners reported an average of 89 patient visits per week" in 2014 (Ritchie). Even with increasing this number to 100 patients,

physicians and general practitioners would be capable of seeing only 5,200 patients per year. Assuming that each clinic staffs two physicians, each clinic would be able to see 10,400 patients per year. Therefore, this results in a difference of 28,883 patients for Broward County and 3,733 patients for Palm Beach County per clinic per year. This calculation is done by subtracting the 10,400 patients possible per clinic from the poor per clinic that was calculated above. Although this seems like a large difference in patients, other counties have a better population to clinic ratio. Franklin County, for example, has only 992 poor per clinic. In order to truly assess the situation for residents with low-moderate income, one must also take into account the clinic services offered. Franklin County has three clinics which all provide primary care and one that also provides dental care. These clinics are also found in three cities, rather than being clustered in one large city. This spread enables more of the county population to have access to health care. On the other hand, some counties have a high concentration of clinics in only one city. Duval County has 913,010 residents (of which 166,168 are considered to be poor) and a whopping 43 clinics. However, all of these clinics are found in Jacksonville. As a result, affordable transportation options are even more important in this county. Although this is preliminary research, one can already see some of the struggles faced by those with low-moderate incomes.

Rank by Population	County	Population	% in poverty	Population in Poverty	# of Clinics	Poor/Clinic	Excess Over 10,400
1	Miami-Dade	2,693,117	20.4	549,396	45+	12,208.80	1,808.80
2	Broward	1,896,425	14.5	274,982	7	39,283.14	28,883.14
3	Palm Beach	1,422,789	14.9	211,996	15	14,133.07	3,733.07
4	Hillsborough	1,349,050	16.8	226,640	27	8,394.07	0
5	Orange	1,288,126	18.2	234,439	38	6,169.45	0
63	Jefferson	14,081	18	2,535	1	2,535.00	0
64	Glades	13,670	21.1	2,884	1	2,884.00	0
65	Franklin	11,761	25.3	2,976	3	992.00	0
66	Lafayette	8,663	25.6	2,218	2	1,109.00	0
67	Liberty	8,331	24.7	2,058	1	2,058.00	0

Table A

Through much research, many different types of clinics were found. These include free and reduced cost options for the homeless, those that are under or uninsured, and those that fall below 200% of the federal poverty level. A wide range of clinic services were also found to treat anything from STDs to tooth extractions to minor surgeries. However, this wide range is not seen county by county. It is instead seen when one looks at the state as a whole. Work must still be done in order to bring all of these options to every county in the state of Florida. Although much information was easily found, some roadblocks were also encountered. This project focused on information from the Florida Association of Free and Charitable Clinics website, the Free Clinic Directory website, and the Florida Department of Health website. Since freeclinicdirectory.org is user updated, some information was out of date. This information included disconnected phone numbers and websites that were no longer in use. As a researcher this was slightly frustrating and would be even more frustrating as a low-moderate income individual in need of health care. Furthermore, the specialization of clinics could make it confusing when searching for a specific medical service. Although healthcare is extremely important, it is not the only thing that low-moderate income individuals must search for. They must also find transportation options that fit within their budgets and allow them to make their medical appointments.

To understand the transportation options available to low-moderate income individuals one must first understand the transportation disadvantaged program. This is especially important in counties that do not have good public transportation options such as fixed route bus systems. Transportation disadvantaged persons are those, "who because of physical or mental disability, income status, or age are unable to transport themselves or to purchase transportation and are,

therefore, dependent upon others to obtain access to health care, employment, education, shopping, social activities, or other life-sustaining activities, or children who are handicapped or high-risk or at-risk as defined in s. 411.202 (Transportation Disadvantaged)." Each county in the state of Florida has a program in place. The Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) contracts a Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) for each county who may directly provide transportation services or may contract Transportation Operators to do so (FL CTD). To qualify for this program, one must fill out an application describing one's current income and transportation situation among other things. This qualification process can take up to 21 days (Shared). Services are provided on a curb to curb- shared ride basis (also known as paratransit service) and reservations must be made in advance. The cost of transportation through the transportation disadvantaged program varies depending on the distance traveled and the available grants as well as the customer's county of residence. A wide range of fares were found from no cost to twenty dollars. Some, such as the Citrus County Transit Bus, had a transportation disadvantaged one way fare of three dollars. Others, such as Charlotte County Transit, simply required a one dollar co pay. This is not a perfect program, but it can be extremely helpful and has the ability to improve.

To be able to successfully use the services provided for the transportation disadvantaged, one must be quite patient. Some services even state that they are not able to be a main source of transportation for work because of an inability to have an exact drop off time. Big Bend Transit, for example, states that, "return trips will be made within an hour of the requested time (Big Bend Transit)." Some services within the transportation disadvantaged program give more chances to "no-shows" than others. This can be worrisome for those whose only way to get to appointments and other life-sustaining activities is through the transportation disadvantaged

program. One no-show with Big Bend Transit in Taylor County results in a charge and/or cancellation of transportation privileges. Other companies suspend services for a number of days based on the amount of no-shows on record. Another possible source of frustration for those trying to find affordable transportation through the transportation disadvantaged program is the fact that some of the links on the CTD website are outdated. An example of this can be seen in the link for the Suwannee River Economic Council website which brings up a bright house search rather than an actual website. Although information can be found, it is not as user friendly as it could be. Furthermore, many of the Community Transportation Coordinator's websites focus on transportation for the elderly even though any transportation disadvantaged individual may use their services. This can be confusing for low-moderate income individuals in search of transportation. More effort needs to be put into advertising these services and making them more accessible. A simple Google search, for example, of public transportation options in any given county is more likely to yield public school bus information than anything that may be of use to low-moderate income individuals. Finally, some company websites such as that of MV Transit give no truly useful information to potential customers. No fares are listed and the areas serviced are also absent. As this website is linked to from the CTD website, it can be frustrating for those expecting to find this information in order to coordinate transportation. Although it was the most easily found, the transportation disadvantaged program is not the only service available for those searching for low cost forms of transportation.

Other transportation services available to those of low-moderate income are car buying programs created specifically for this demographic as well as regular public transit. Unfortunately, car buying programs are truly few and far between. Only six such programs were found in the state of Florida throughout the course of this project. These programs allow

individuals with no or poor credit to buy cars in a variety of ways. Some offer loans that would not usually be available to these individuals while others offer used cars at low monthly payments. Owning a personal vehicle can be seen as a sign of independence (Nichols). However, since this is oftentimes impossible due to financial situations, other options must be considered in order to maintain one's health. Another option would be the regular public transportation found in each county. Some transportation disadvantaged providers even suggest that regular public transportation is best for those who are physically able to ride it. This is because many still offer a discount to the transportation disadvantaged and operate on a set schedule. The downside to utilizing this option is the fact that passengers are not dropped off directly at their desired locations but rather at predetermined stops. However, it can still be a good option for those looking for a low-cost and reliable form of transportation.

In conclusion, the state of Florida in general has a wide variety of free and reduced cost clinics. Transportation options, although more limited, can also be found in each county. Gaps in the variety of health care services available appear when one looks at each county individually. In comparison to more developed areas, rural areas face gaps in simply having clinics regardless of the services available. This results in a high concentration of clinics in one city within a county. Thus, in order to have access to these somewhat limited resources, one must have reliable transportation. A similar problem, however, can be found in the transportation options available in rural areas. The transportation disadvantaged program was the one form of transportation that could be found in all 67 counties for low income individuals. However, other services are also available. It is important to better advertise these services as well as to look for ways to improve them to help those in need. One must look past survival for those with low-

moderate incomes and toward stability in order to truly aid them in achieving health,

transportation, and ultimately independence.

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