

Opinion: Barton meeting community's health needs

By John Williams

It takes collaboration and action to meet a community's health needs. In March 2012, Barton Health engaged with the community to complete a comprehensive Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) of South Lake Tahoe's health needs.

Part of the Affordable Care Act, all nonprofit hospitals must identify health needs for vulnerable, often under-served, populations within their community and create an action plan to address these needs. Using community input, local data, and a team of dedicated community stakeholders, three top health gaps specific to our area were identified: substance abuse, access to healthcare, and mental health. In two years, since the initial CHNA took place, Barton has taken action to address pressing health issues and better serve our local residents.



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Substance abuse is prevalent in South Lake Tahoe; the area has four times the national average of illicit drug use, a high percentage of chronic drinkers, and a higher rate of drug-induced deaths. By 11th grade, 74 percent of South Tahoe High School students admitted using alcohol and 56 percent had tried marijuana.

To help reduce substance abuse, some of Barton's efforts include: Participating in and financially sponsoring Every 15 Minutes and the Drug Store Project – discouraging alcohol and drug use by local youth. Joining and now chairing monthly South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition meetings. Donating \$7,500 toward local nonprofits with the goal of reducing substance abuse. Hosting a physician seminar to discuss drug addiction and pain management. Facilitating a six-session training on best pain management practices for healthcare providers in the county.

There are many barriers that cause a lack of access to healthcare, including lack of insurance coverage and financial barriers. To improve access, Barton has: Expanded the Community Health Center by 3,000 feet and added seven exam rooms to help under and uninsured. Services expanded to include Saturdays and same-day appointments. Increased our Telehealth services to include eight different specialties, allowing patients to speak to specialists locally, saving time and travel. Launched BWell, with discounted cash pay CT, EKG, and lab services and free wellness lectures. Donated over 700 hours of staff time to help over 125 uninsured families navigate CoveredCA.com and enroll in a healthcare plan. Implemented "Transitions in Care" that provides free at-home visits for patients with certain chronic medical conditions after being released from the hospital.

The third issue prioritized was mental health. Barton has: Hired a full-time child psychiatrist who provides services at Barton Psychiatry and Barton Community Health Center, and expanded tele-psychiatry services with four contracted psychiatrists. Provided \$28,000 in grants for local nonprofits that service people with mental health needs. Hosted a community health forum on mental health needs. Published five mental health articles and conducted two community lectures on mental health needs. Ongoing grief support for the community and an annual children's bereavement camp.

In an on-going effort to serve our community, Barton Health will be collecting input from residents for the next assessment in 2015. The public will participate in phone surveys, public health data will be gathered, and focus groups will provide a clinical and social service perspective.

To view a complete report of Barton's results to address the CHNA, go online.

John Williams is CEO of Barton Health.