



Barry-Eaton  
District  
Health  
Department

# Maternal-Child Health Assessment: Community Themes and Strengths Analysis

June 2017



In 2016, Barry-Eaton District Health Department completed an assessment of data regarding the maternal and child health outcomes and behaviors for Barry and Eaton Counties. In 2017, we began additional assessments aimed at providing additional clarity and nuance to our understanding of the issues affecting maternal and child health in our district.

To assess Barry and Eaton counties' themes and strengths, we relied on data from 2017 intercept surveys and focus groups.

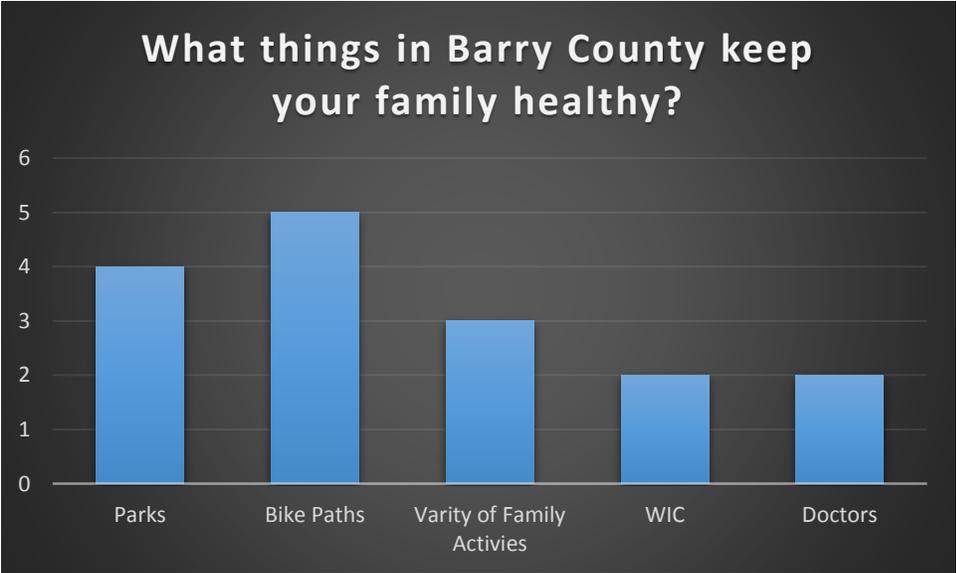
## INTERCEPT SURVEYS

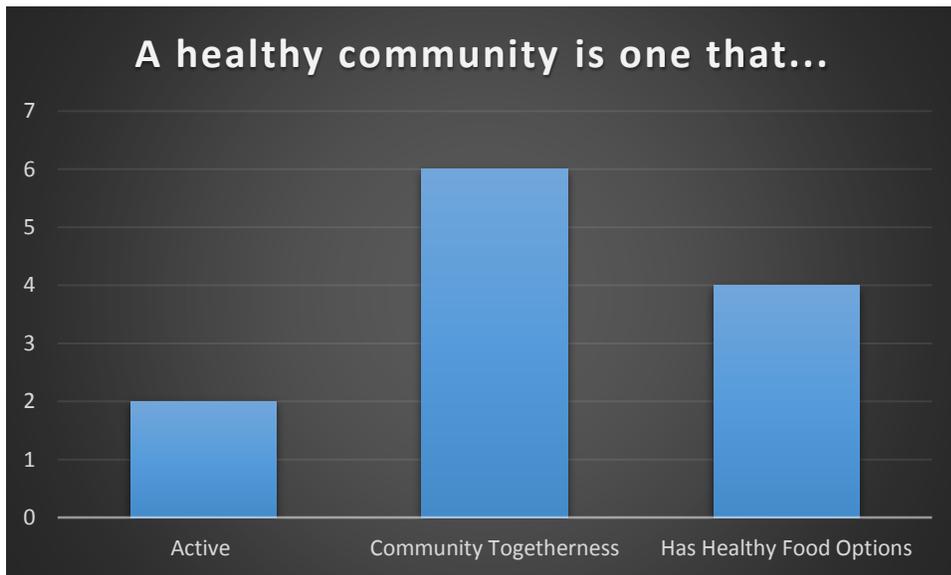
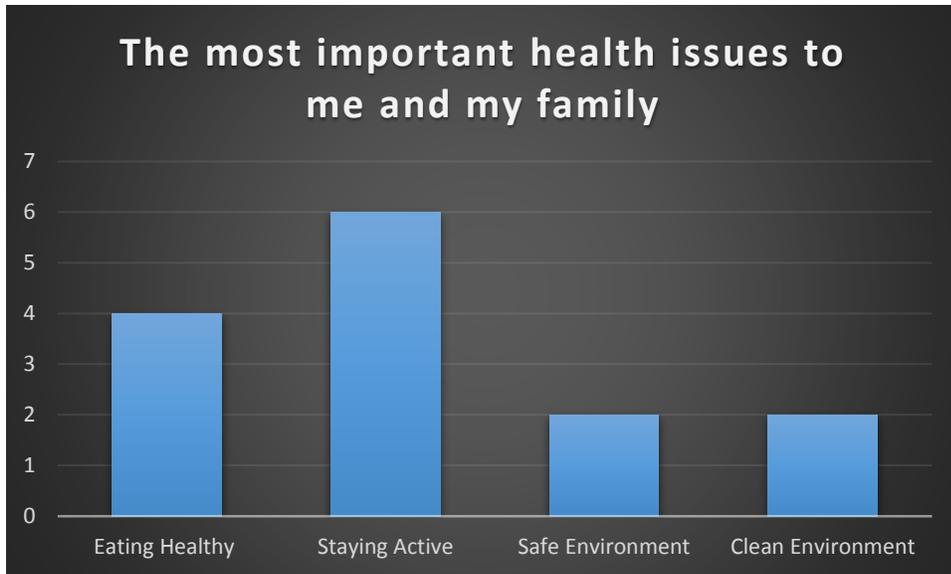
The Barry-Eaton District Health Department conducted an intercept survey to collect data from county residents on the community themes and strengths in relation to health in both Barry and Eaton Counties. Our particular interest was with families of young to school-age children.

### Barry County

*17 surveys*

Intercept surveys were distributed in Barry County at one of the Preschool Round-ups, as well as to families that are receiving PAT home visits, and parents of GSRP students. The survey was designed to collect qualitative data, participants were able to fill in their own responses to the survey questions. The data below represents the common themes reported by participants.





Participants were also asked, “What does Barry County need to help parents and kids become healthier?” The following were the most common responses:

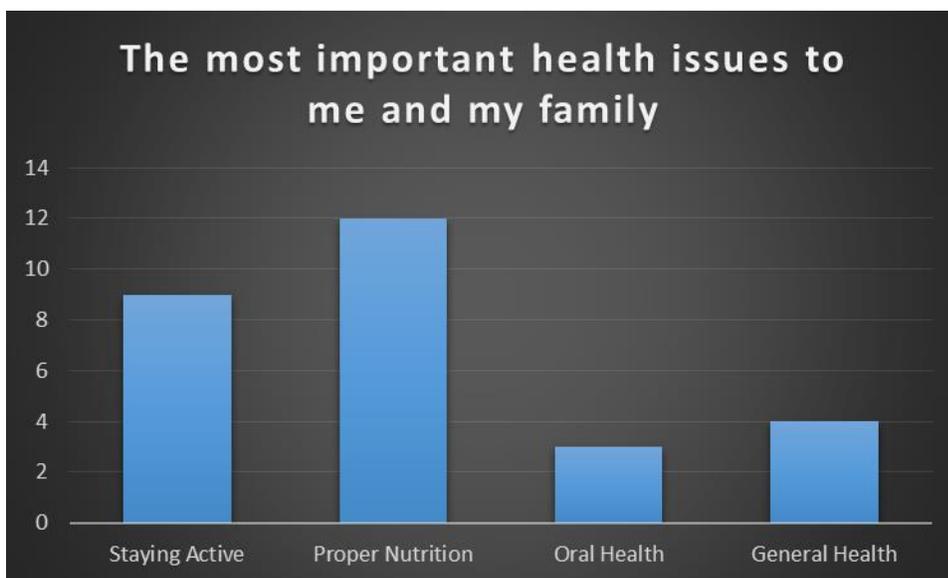
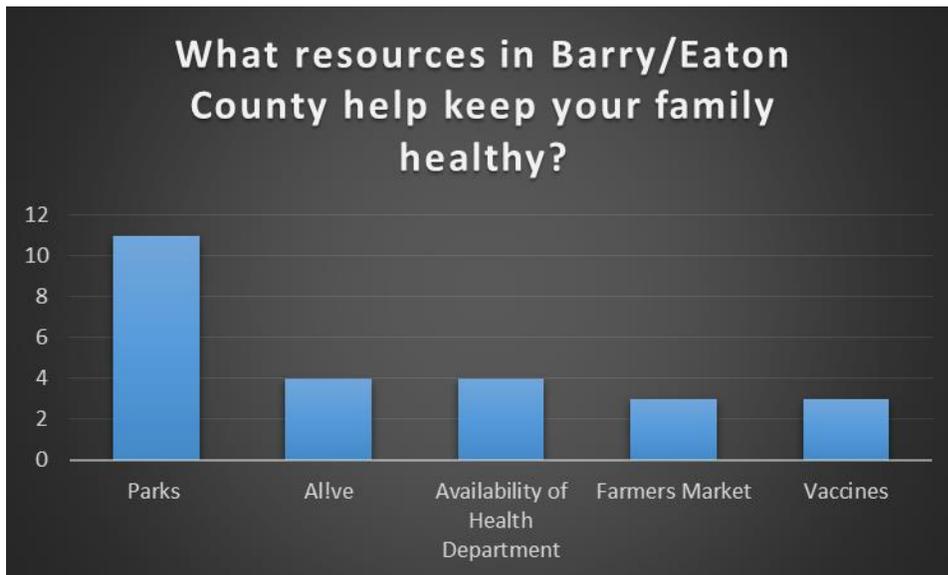
- Better communication of community events
- More options at the farmers market
- Focus on cleaning up drug issue in county
- Affordable healthy food options
- Programs to keep families active

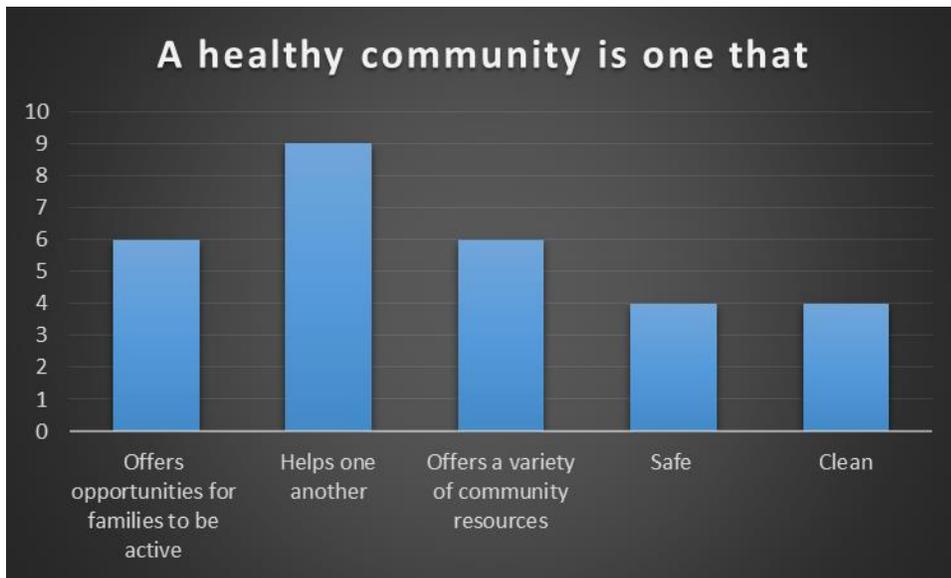
Participants were asked to rate how healthy they believe Barry County is. On a scale of 1-10 residents rated Barry County 6.7 for overall health.

## Eaton County

32 surveys

Surveys were distributed at Kindergarten Round Up events around Eaton County to parents of incoming kindergarteners. A box of crayons was available as an incentive for participating in the survey. The survey was designed to collect qualitative data, participants were able to fill in their own responses to the survey questions. The data below represents common themes reported by participants.





In response to the 4<sup>th</sup> survey question “What things does Eaton County need to help parents and kids become healthier?” the most common themes were “more outdoor activities for families to do together, better communication of community events, and a good farmers market with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Participants were asked to rate how healthy they believe Barry County is. On a scale of 1-10 residents rated Barry County 7.3 for overall health.

# FOCUS GROUPS

## Barry County

### *Two participants that were mothers of infants*

Participants defined health as being able to do daily activities without struggling and ensuring that their kids develop correctly and as encompassing mental and physical health.

In general, participants rated themselves and their children as healthy, around an 8 out of 10; some chronic conditions (e.g., acid reflux, ADD) caused participants to rate their children's health below 10. Participants expressed that they think the future generation will be less healthy due to the fast-food culture—"at every corner you have a fast-food restaurant ... you have something junk at the snap of your fingers." The other participant agreed, adding that because "kids are more active," they are more likely to grab something quick. Despite this, they recognized that schools are doing a good job at trying to keep kids healthy, through summer lunch programs, partnering with the YMCA, etc.

Both participants go to Grand Rapids for their OBGYNs and pediatricians. They had bad experiences with local pediatrics, and while the acquisition of Pennock by Spectrum was seen as positive, they had negative views of Pennock (overcrowding of patients, too small, their care is bad, etc.) They also mentioned that Hastings also has no specialists or NICU.

Mentioned barriers to being healthy include, as mentioned above, a lack of quick, healthy restaurants and a lack of local, quality doctors and specialists.

Participants seemed very positive about local resources that help keep their families healthy. They think Hastings is doing well with things like the splash pad, YMCA, parks, farmers market, and walkways. Participants would like to see a store like Whole Foods with organic options, more advertising and utilization of the farmers market, and more local pediatricians to ensure that all children have the opportunity to be healthy.

Both participants had experienced difficulties with breastfeeding. One wasn't able to with her child, and the other wasn't able to with one of her children but was able to with the other. They acknowledged that about 8 years ago, no one talked about or saw breastfeeding, but now there are a lot more people who breastfeed. They see the advocates coming out as good, and they hope these pro-breastfeeding trends continue. In spite of the advocacy and increased number of breastfeeding moms, "people aren't used to it. Always somebody's shocked; somebody's going to stare; somebody's going to give you a dirty look or tell you to cover up." They "feel like the public opinion affects the way we take care of our kids." Both participants praised Babies R Us's mother's nurturing room lounge and the malls that are starting to have breastfeeding areas. One participant said that while she is fine with anyone breastfeeding in public, she would usually try to find place to be discreet because she didn't want the judgment.

In terms of encouraging breastfeeding among new moms, participants thought that having places to go to breastfeed—mother's lounges / spots to do it in stores—would be helpful, especially for self-conscious moms and moms worried about modesty. The Baby Café idea was very well received, especially the support group aspect of connecting with other moms to talk about methods and what worked / didn't work, and just to be able to socialize in general. One participant went to a similar

support-type group, and she drove 40 miles to do it. Both said that they would have utilized a Baby Café if there had been one.

Feedback on WIC was overwhelmingly positive. Participants love the support it gives them and being able to talk with lactation consultants. It helps them to get the formula and Pediasure/Carnation/etc. that their children need. They like that if people are having a hard time breastfeeding, WIC offers supplemental formula, encouragement, and support. Participants do wish that WIC could be expanded to children over than 5, especially if they are underweight or have health issues.

Lastly, participants were interested in having a resource compilation of some sort (brochure, community board, etc.) that lists available resources, child/family activities, mother support groups, etc., because otherwise it's up to individuals to find out what services are offered in the community. They also would like to see resources for men with children, such a changing tables in men's restrooms and family bathrooms.

## Eaton County

### *Three participants that were mothers of infants*

Participants defined health as eating well, taking care of themselves, making sure their kids grow up happy and healthy, and making positive influences on children.

In general, participants rated themselves and their children as pretty healthy, around an 8 out of 10. Participants think and/or hope that their kids will be healthier than they are, because they try to model good behavior for them and teach them about healthy habits.

Based on this group, moms in Eaton County go to the Lansing area (including Okemos) for their pediatricians, OBGYNs, and dentists. Participants were of the opinion that there aren't any quality local dentists.

Mentioned barriers to being healthy included a lack of healthy "fast food" options (e.g., Chipotle) in Eaton County, the cost of resources such as ALIVE and the community pool, and a lack of convenient/preferred grocery stores and stores with healthy/specialty foods (e.g., rice milk). Some other barriers listed included the high cost of vitamins/supplements, the modern food system (more pollution, GMOs, byproducts, etc.), and a lack of knowledge of resources to turn to.

ALIVE and parks and trails were listed as great resources to help families become healthy, but, again, the cost of ALIVE is restrictive, and local parks have no guided programming for fitness and, when compared to Lansing parks, have less amenities. One participant commented, "If ALIVE and the aquatic center were free, I can't imagine how many kids would benefit." She noted that local parks are free, but they have "no instructional workouts or play, or exciting things like the tree house at ALIVE." Another participant agreed, saying, "We go to parks elsewhere with other amenities."

In regard to breastfeeding, two of the participants stated expressly that they breastfeed everywhere. It was mentioned that sometimes breastfeeding in public can be uncomfortable, but there is awareness that it is a legal and protected right. Participants implied that they seek out specific "preferred" breastfeeding locations: "If I'm in Lansing and I have a chance to stop, I'll go to Babies R Us [to breastfeed];" this mom mentioned that Babies R Us has comfortable chairs that are "better than a bench at Target or the shoe department at Meijer."

Participants were aware of the breastfeeding normalization movement and the positive affects these campaigns have on encouraging breastfeeding. One participant mentioned that seeing women breastfeeding in ads gives her a sense of resilience: “If they do it, I can do it.” Other breastfeeding feedback included that lactation consultants should be required to visit every new mom in the hospital and that they should be free, and that there is a need for local help (e.g., breastfeeding groups like La Leche League). The Baby Café idea was received positively. There was unanimous agreement that stores should have special, comfortable breastfeeding areas and that participants would frequent stores with this amenity more often. For example, even though Target says that moms can breastfeed anywhere, they aren’t just going to climb into a comfortable display chair—“I’m going to go into a dressing room or other uncomfortable place.”

Overall, WIC is seen positively. It’s “an amazing resources for mothers and children.” Some criticisms include a need for better breast pumps, more eligible food brands and stores, and more formula and ready-to-feed allowances.