Let’s Start the CONVERSATION

CareAC... making the healthy choice the easy choice in Atlantic City
Atlantic City: a CONVERSATION for health

In 2015, the AtlantiCare Foundation was awarded funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation- New Jersey Health Initiatives to explore ways to make “the healthy choice the easy choice in Atlantic City.” As a result, CareAC, a community coalition, was formed to identify and impact health concerns for the City of Atlantic City. CareAC started the CONVERSATION for health by assembling a cross-sector coalition of residents, businesses and organizations representing the health, education and social service fields to address barriers to health.

1. Seek partners with a shared interest in the health of Atlantic City. Form a coalition, review actionable data, build trust to foster a culture of health

2. With assistance from partners create and implement Blue Print for Action

3. Continue to engage partners to strengthen organizations and the community

4. Continue to monitor health barriers in Atlantic City and identify opportunities for improvement through formed partnerships

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CareAC is comprised of an inter-agency steering committee, and a larger coalition of several community non-profits and service organizations.

**Community Partners**

- A Work in Progress Foundation
- AC Youth in Motion
- Atlantic City Board of Education
- Atlantic City Health Department
- Atlantic City Housing Authority
- Atlantic City Police Department
- Atlantic City Recreation Department
- Atlantic City Tourism District
- AtlantiCare
- Bass Pro Shops
- Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City
- CASA for Children
- Cedar Food Market
- Chelsea Neighborhood Association
- Coalition of Safer Communities
- Community Food Bank of NJ
- Connecting the Dots, Inc.

- Cumberland Cape Atlantic YMCA
- Family Service Association
- Fellowship of Churches
- Gateway Community Action Partnership
- Growing Green AtlantiCare
- Jewish Family Services
- Police Athletic League
- Robins Nest, Inc. Organization
- Rutgers University - SNAP-Ed
- Seeds of Hope
- Southern Jersey Family Medical Centers, Inc.
- Spanish Community Center
- Stockton University
- Tanger Outlets
- The City of Atlantic City
- Venice Park Civic Association
- Vision 2000 CDC

**CareAC Steering Committee**

- Merydawilda Colon, Stockton University
- Samantha Kiley, AtlantiCare Foundation
- Marcia McCulley, AtlantiCare Foundation
- Sharon Simon, Jewish Family Services
- Eddie Tate, AtlantiCare
- Tracey Triniwell, Boys and Girls Club
- Christine Zellers, Rutgers SNAP-Ed

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Atlantic City, New Jersey:

The City of Atlantic City is located in Atlantic County, which is one of 21 counties in New Jersey. It is located in the southeastern corridor of the State. Atlantic City is part of the 8.1 mile long Absecon Island, along with Ventnor City, Margate and Longport. Atlantic City is a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse community, with urban neighborhoods, a seasonal beach and bay district and a city in turmoil with recent casino closings due to economic downturn.

According to United States Census Bureau figures, there are just over 39,000 people and 15,847 family households in Atlantic City. There are hundreds of different languages spoken in the City, and in fact, the school district recently added to their staff a case worker who speaks over 40 languages to meet the needs of the many diverse families who attend their schools. The most common languages other than English are Spanish, Bengali, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Cantonese, Mandarin and Gujarati. The racial makeup of Atlantic City is Black (38%), Hispanic or Latinos (30%), White (26%), and Asian (15%) making up the majority of the community. The median family income has decreased to $26,936 – more than $45,000 below the State average with 35.8% of persons living below the poverty level (compared to 11.1% on the State level).

According to the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, 17% of Atlantic County residents report having poor or fair health and 18% report being uninsured. Atlantic County ranks 18th out of the 21 New Jersey counties. Being that Atlantic City is the most diverse community in Atlantic County with the greatest needs, it can be assumed that these percentages may be even greater in the City of Atlantic City.

Atlantic City’s multi-cultural characteristics bring unique healthcare needs and challenges and they are as diverse as the people residing in the City – whether it is serving families with young children, active adults in the prime of their life, or older residents who may be facing age-related issues or living with chronic diseases. Although diversity may bring challenges, it is important to note that such diversity is looked at as a valued community resource by proud Atlantic City citizens who truly care for their community.

In addition to economic challenges, many residents of Atlantic City face health disparities which disproportionately increase their likelihood for chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. These diseases are debilitating and can negatively impact one’s quality of life. Poor nutrition and the lack of fresh and healthy foods are root causes associated with many chronic conditions. Fresh and healthy foods are nutrient dense and provide the body with much needed vitamins and minerals to prevent illness and manage disease. Deemed a food desert, until recently, Atlantic City was without a proper grocery store within its City limits, and even now offers limited food choices in its corner and convenience stores. As a result, Atlantic City residents have issues associated with hunger and food insecurity, as well as inadequate access to healthy foods. This lack of food and access to healthy and fresh foods directly corresponds to the City’s high incidence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity among its residents, and impacts the health of the City’s youth.

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The beginning of an important **CONVERSATION**: CareAC was charged with reviewing the current health status of residents in Atlantic City, and to work as a team to address barriers to health. Conversations result in commitment by making health a shared value. Collectively the group reviewed the socio-economic and health data associated with the City of Atlantic City and looked at health indicators and lifestyle behaviors that present a barrier to health.
### Clinical Care

| Service                        | Uninsured | 16-19% | 11% | 15% | 1,320:1 | 1,040:1 | 1,170:1 | 1,860:1 | 1,340:1 | 1,220:1 | 850:1 | 370:1 | 570:1 | Preventable hospital stays | 62 | 59-64 | 38 | 55 | Diabetic monitoring | 84% | 81-87% | 90% | 84% | Mammography screening | 62% | 59-65% | 71% | 61% |

*Additional Clinical Care (not included in overall ranking)*

### Social & Economic Factors

| Factor                                | High school graduation | 85% | 93% | 88% | Some college | 57% | 54-55% | 72% | 66% | Unemployment | 10.4% | 3.5% | 6.6% | Children in poverty | 24% | 20-27% | 13% | 16% | Income inequality | 4.8 | 4.6-5.1 | 3.7 | 5.1 | Children in single-parent households | 41% | 39-44% | 21% | 30% | Social associations | 8.8 | 22.1 | 8.3 | Violent crime | 499 | 59 | 302 | Injury deaths | 57 | 62-71 | 51 | 42 |

*Additional Social & Economic Factors (not included in overall ranking)*

### Physical Environment

| Factor                                | Air pollution - particulate matter | 11.2 | 9.5 | 11.3 | Drinking water violations | No | No | Severe housing problems | 26% | 24-27% | 9% | 23% | Driving alone to work | 77% | 75-78% | 71% | 72% | Long commute - driving alone | 28% | 26-29% | 16% | 42% |

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*2015

^ 10th/90th percentile, i.e., only 10% are better.

Note: Blank values reflect unreliable or missing data

** Data should not be compared with prior years due to changes in definition/methods
Information is the highway to health. To determine barriers to health and available resources our partners joined forces to provide input via a questionnaire.

Input from over three dozen civic and community organizations provided insight on what they regard as the most pressing issues. Statistics are great, but it is imperative to hear from agencies and community members - those with feet on the street, what they deem the most pressing issues facing Atlantic City.

A snapshot of their responses yielded the following barriers to health:

- Lack of access to healthy foods and beverage choices
- Safe play spaces
- Education for healthy living
- Poverty
- Cultural division
- Education
- Communication
- Stress reduction
- Access to fitness
- Negative Community Perception
- Resource connectivity at health care visits

These responses laid the foundation for working toward our Blue Print for Action.

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Early successes from effective CONVERSATIONS and collaboration.

We fortified our foundation by utilizing our partnerships to accomplish early successes to solidify the strength of our relationships, including:

- Purchase of a produce refrigerator for the Community Food Bank branch servicing Atlantic City residents.
- Creation of ThisisAC - a community multi-pronged social media movement with a mission to highlight the beauty of Atlantic City
- Introduced a Corner Store Initiative, utilizing multi-sector organizations
- Hosted Atlantic City Nutrition Forum with USDA and community partners to address summer feeding
- Community Food Bank of New Jersey Mobile Food Bank partnership with AtlantiCare to provide food to our underserved population while providing medical awareness
- Successful audience with State Senator James Whelan and letter of support for initiatives

Moving data to action

In its inaugural year, CareAC has elevated nutrition and physical activity as health priorities for the City of Atlantic City, as these behaviours have the ability to prevent, delay, and reduce the impact of chronic conditions.

Good nutrition and regular physical activity is the cornerstone of health. Environmental factors play a major role in influencing health. Atlantic City residents are limited on where they can purchase fresh fruits and vegetables and physical activity opportunities are restricted due to lack of offerings and/or resources. It is critically important to address these factors to improve nutrition and physical activity levels and ultimately address their impact on health. By focusing on nutrition and physical activity, our efforts have the ability to impact several health conditions at the same time (i.e. co-morbid chronic conditions including diabetes, heart disease, depression) while at the same time laying the ground work to prevent future generations from getting these diseases.

The Goals of the Blueprint will be activated through the offering of Mini-Grants.

To provide funding to advance CareAC's Blue Print for Action, mini-grants will be offered to agencies to start addressing the need. To be eligible for funding, agencies serving Atlantic City residents must work in collaboration with at least one other group to enhance the nutrition and/or physical activity of those they serve and must impact a policy, system, or environmental change to ensure long term sustainability. Working in collaboration will create synergy, improve upon relationships, eliminate duplication of effort and continue to underscore the importance of working as a coalition.

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CareAC: Blue Print for Action

OVERALL GOAL I: NUTRITION
Create access to healthy foods in Atlantic City.

Healthy food is essential for good health and well-being. A poor diet and limited access to healthy foods increases risk factors for chronic disease. All activities listed below were identified with the outcome of increased access and demand for healthy foods— including fruits and vegetables.

BOLD ACTION STEPS

1. Leverage Partnerships to Expand Healthy Feeding Opportunities

   **Measure:** number of identified partnerships and sites

   **Goal year 1:** Increase participation of Atlantic City youth in summer feeding program
   **Indicators of Success:** Informational Sessions Held, at least 1 new sponsor and 10 sites established
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers- SNAP Ed, Community Food Bank, and AtlantiCare

   **Goal years 2-3:** Build upon relationships and initiate a Healthy AC Summit
   **Indicators of Success:** Continued growth of summer feeding program to have new sponsors and feeding sites established with the hopes of 40% of eligible children are able to be fed. Summit held to identify opportunity to address ongoing feeding needs in the City of Atlantic City
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers- SNAP Ed, Community Food Bank, Jewish Family Services and AtlantiCare

2. Corner Store Initiative Collaboration to Expand Healthy Food Selection in Corner Stores

   **Measure:** number of stores that participate

   **Goal year 1:** Participation of 7 stores
   **Indicators of Success:** 7 stores participate and at least 2 partners identify ways to promote healthy items available at Corner Stores in Atlantic City
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers- SNAP Ed, Cape Cumberland YMCA, AtlantiCare

   **Goal years 2-3:** Re-evaluate program and seek opportunities for expansion to additional stores and partners. **Indicators of Success:** 2 additional stores/partners and a consistent promotional opportunity to collectively support corner stores
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers- SNAP Ed, Cape Cumberland YMCA, AtlantiCare, Jewish Family Services

3. Expand School and Community Garden projects

   **Measure:** number of gardens established

   **Goal year 1:** Identify and implement at least 1 additional garden
   **Indicators of Success:** Garden site identified and garden growing
   **Accountable Partners:** AtlantiCare, Work in Progress Foundation, Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City

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Goal years 2-3: Re-evaluate programming and seek opportunities for expansion to include an additional partner for garden maintenance. Develop a youth summer program to support garden maintenance.

Indicators of Success: Community partners identified for garden maintenance and support. Summer Youth program established.

Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare, Work in Progress Foundation, Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City

4. Expand Nutrition and Healthy Food Preparation Education

Measure: number of programs offered

Goal year 1: Expand offered programs via youth and senior groups/services

Indicator of Success: At least 3 new sites to provide educational programs

Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare, PALS, Rutgers-SNAP Ed, Jewish Family Services, Vision 2000

Goal years 2-3: identify sites for classes, expand programming and increase services

Indicator of Success: Inventory complete and site listing prepared to include at least 10 opportunities to learn how to prepare healthy foods.

Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare, Richard Stockton University, Rutgers-SNAP Ed,

5. Implement Provider-directed Fruit and Veggie Prescription Program

Measure: Prescription sheets being utilized by local Atlantic City based providers

Goal year 1: Prescriptions are developed with key scripting, 1 clinical partner identified

Indicator of Success: Clinical partners utilizing produce script pads.

Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare, Rutgers- SNAP Ed, Jewish Family Services

Goal years 2-3: at least 2 clinical partners utilize prescriptions

Indicator of Success: Clinical partners utilizing produce script pads.

Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare, Rutgers- SNAP Ed, Jewish Family Services, and Southern Jersey Family Medicine
OVERALL GOAL II: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
Promote positive behaviors that increase physical activity in Atlantic City.

Physical activity is essential to a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity is a measure that improves health and reduces preventable risks associated with several health conditions. All activities listed below work to create and maintain safe and affordable places to be physically active in the Atlantic City.

BOLD ACTION STEPS

1. Advocate for Physical Activity Opportunities

   **Measure:** number of existing and new physical activity opportunities

   **Goal year 1:** Inventory physical activity opportunities and provide a directory
   **Indicator of Success:** Inventory complete and directory created
   **Accountable Partners:** AtlantiCare, #ThisisAC, Richard Stockton University
   **Goal years 2-3:** increase opportunities for physical activities
   **Indicator of Success:** Establish at least 3 city-wide endeavors to promote physical activities
   **Accountable Partners:** AtlantiCare, Richard Stockton University, #This is AC

2. Receive Designation as a Playful City USA for 2017

   **Measure:** secure designation

   **Goal year 1:** research viability, secure partners, apply
   **Indicator of Success:** Application Complete
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers SNAP-Ed, The City of Atlantic City, #This is AC

   **Goal years 2-3:** Promote designation once obtained
   **Indicator of Success:** Designation obtained
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers SNAP-Ed, The City of Atlantic City, #This is AC

3. Designate Wellness Ambassadors

   **Measure:** number of Wellness Ambassadors

   **Goal year 1:** establish criteria for Wellness Ambassadors and identify participants
   **Indicator of Success:** Criteria established, and ambassadors identified
   **Accountable Partners:** Rutgers SNAP-Ed, AtlantiCare, #This is AC, Jewish Family Services

   **Goal years 2-3:** evaluate program and make annual opportunity for recognition
   **Indicator of Success:** Annually Ambassadors identified
   **Accountable Partners:** Stockton University, Rutgers SNAP-Ed, Boys and Girls Club of Atlantic City, Jewish Family Services, City of Atlantic City, AtlantiCare
OVERALL GOAL III:
Continue to monitor health barriers in Atlantic City and identify opportunities for improvement.

BOLD ACTION STEPS
1. Continue to Work with Stakeholders and Community Partners to Determine Health Barriers

   Measure: Opportunities established to engage in city wide, interagency dialogue and collaboratively address additional health concerns for the City of Atlantic City

   Goal year 1: Identify additional resident health concerns and barriers via the facilitation of a health survey for City residents.
   Indicator of Success: Survey Complete and data collected and shared.
   Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare

   Goal years 2-3: Establish quarterly city-round tables with health information and topics to be shared
   Indicators of Success: Expansion of blue print to include additional city-wide health concerns and strategies to address
   Accountable Partners: AtlantiCare, Rutgers SNAP-Ed, Jewish Family Services, and additional Coalition participating agencies

MOVING THE FORWARD

A number of development projects will bring new groups to the City and opportunities to promote a healthier mindset and lifestyle. We will utilize the partnerships formed through CareAC to create a healthy Atlantic City “Welcome Kit” for new and current audiences. The Kit will include materials for healthier options, such as a shopping choices, restaurants and locations for physical activity. Our efforts will help the community navigate Atlantic City with a focus on health – making the healthy choice the easy choice.

Keep the CONVERSATION going ... Looking to the Future

While CareAC has the foundation in place to work collaboratively to promote health and wellness, we may not be able to address every community need identified in our meetings or through health statistics. To bridge this gap, CareAC will continue to support and foster relationships with agencies and community partners that offer assistance to Atlantic City residents. We will act as the facilitator of time, talent and resources and keep the partners working in unison to address the needs of Atlantic City. In addition, through this Blue Print, we will continue to monitor activities that address the community’s needs and readjust planned activities when necessary. The coalition is focused and energized to expand our work into bigger community issues.
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