Strategies to Achieving National Standards of Healthcare Access: A Qualitative Analysis of Cook County Health System

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Introduction

- Compared to other developed nations, the United States ranks worst overall in healthcare access while spending the most per capita. This study looks at access through an international and national lens.
- Cook County Health (CCH) is part of the healthcare safety net, providing access to healthcare services to over 600,000 people annually in metropolitan Chicago. As one of the largest public health systems in the United States, CCH plays an important role in providing access to healthcare services.
- CCH recently approved its 2023–2025 strategic plan. This study aims to evaluate CCH’s access strategies compared to national and international metrics for access improvement. As county health systems provide integral care for millions of patients across the nation, this analysis will provide a case analysis of using Healthy People 2030 and The Commonwealth Fund metrics for county health access.

Objective

The purpose of this study is to identify the healthcare accessibility gaps in the Cook County Health strategic plan for 2023 and aim to use it for comparison with Healthy People 2030 and The Commonwealth Fund to understand the correlation between the local, national, and international health metrics.

Methods

- Figure 1.1 Flowchart of methods for Qualitative analysis of Cook County Health System 2023 strategic plan
  - Code book developed for “access” measures using national and international standards as the domains of affordability and timeliness.
  - Individual coding of Cook County Health System 2023 strategic plan using NVIVO qualitative analysis software
  - Research team review of coded document to improve consistency of coding and address the risk of researcher bias.
  - Thematic analysis of codes to identify gaps and opportunities.

Results

- Table 1.1 Checklist definitions for affordability
  - Patients avoid healthcare or dental care because of cost
  - Does not mention paying bills after care or the course of the years for CCHHS
  - CareLink program has been expanded over the years for CCHHS
  - Medicaid enrollment is low due to the lack of access to coverage
  - When there is a lack of financial healthcare coverage such as insurance or plans for eligible patients
  - Other modes of payment which can lead to high out of pocket expense.
  - Does not mention timeliness of mental health services poses additional barriers
  - This is in a proposed plan but does not discuss in the CCHHS 2023 strategic plan
  - This code was not addressed
  - Accessibility to making appointments for patients and adoption of the patient portal
  - Not discussed
  - Timeliness of obtaining information is discussed in the strategic plan
  - This impacts accessibility of health for patients in the CCHHS 2023 strategic plan
  - This code was not addressed

- Table 1.2 Checklist definitions for timeliness
  - More quickly patients can obtain information
  - Does not mention paying bills after care or the course of the years for CCHHS
  - CareLink program has been expanded over the years for CCHHS
  - Medicaid enrollment is low due to the lack of access to coverage
  - When there is a lack of financial healthcare coverage such as insurance or plans for eligible patients
  - Other modes of payment which can lead to high out of pocket expense.
  - Does not mention timeliness of mental health services poses additional barriers
  - This is in a proposed plan but does not discuss in the CCHHS 2023 strategic plan
  - This code was not addressed

- Table 1.3 Checklist definitions for accessibility
  - Wait times
  - Nationally, if wait times are addressed

Discussion

- Limitations
  - Limitations that impacted this study from achieving more were time constraints and the number of individuals a part of the research team in addition to resources, biases, geographic location. More can be achieved by having a greater number of researchers conducting observations on gaps in other platforms.

Future studies:

- Research identified gaps through additional data sources and by gaining healthcare leader perspectives
- Understand perspectives from Cook County health representatives responsible for creating and drafting CCHHS strategic plan

References

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Pandemic and natural disasters cause additional barriers

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