

Chapter 12 Healthcare



Introduction

Providing good quality healthcare is a challenge for most small communities in Alabama but from the standpoint of service providers, Lincoln is more fortunate than many Alabama communities of its size. Within the City limits there are currently two physicians groups providing family and internal medicine services as well as several other healthcare professionals providing chiropractic, dental and eye care services. While there is no hospital located within Lincoln's city limits, there are 10 within 30 miles of the city and 31 within 50 miles of the city. With good access to Interstate 20 most citizens will have relatively quick access to major hospitals in the area.

The primary weaknesses identified by the Healthcare Committee included the lack of emergency room care, mental Healthcare and specialty care for Lincoln's aging population. Additionally, while Lincoln has local healthcare providers there is a need for an "urgent care" facility to provide access to healthcare after hours and on weekends. Other needs identified included the need for additional or improved activity centers and facilities (i.e. parks and trails) and the need to educate the citizens of Lincoln regarding the importance healthy of life styles and preventative care.

Another advantage that Lincoln has is access to recently developed information regarding regional healthcare activities through the East Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission.

Healthy Lifestyles¹

Children: Alabama has "the 6th highest rate of overweight and obese children" in the nation, as a result it has been recognized that the current generation of children is the first in American history to have a shorter lifespan than their parents. In order to prepare children for good jobs, they must first have a good foundation: healthy food, a healthy living environment, regular exercise, and a good education. It is well known that healthy children are better equipped to succeed in school and that translates into the fact that better educated persons tend to be healthier. It is also easier to teach children healthy habits than it is to change unhealthy habits already developed in adults. The first step to a healthier Lincoln lies in educating children to make healthy choices.

Senior Citizens: Likewise, today's senior citizen while healthier and more active overall than those of several decades ago, need to have access to activities and resources to support and encourage healthy lifestyles. Because older adults make up the highest percentage of persons

with chronic health conditions it make sense to begin by creating healthy lifestyle programs with them in mind. These programs can then be built upon to include other adult age groups.

Recreation: A healthy lifestyle begins with physical activity. Lincoln currently provides a wide range of athletic programs for young children and youth primarily in the form of organized sports. However, additional programs and facilities should be considered for those children not interested or able to participate in the currently offered activities. Likewise, more adult and senior adult activities should be added to Lincoln's recreation program in order to provide a more well-rounded and inclusive curriculum for citizens to select from.

Community Gardens and Farmers' Markets: Access to fresh food is an important element of achieving a healthy lifestyle. Community gardens are places where children and adults alike can have fun, while exercising and learning about farming, nutrition, self-reliance, and how to become entrepreneurs, through firsthand experience. There are numerous examples of community gardens across the State including Birmingham and Dothan, that may be drawn from as Lincoln works toward establishing a program of its own. These gardens also provide additional social opportunities, and a point of unity for local residents as well as a potential point of income to the community.

Lincoln already has an established Alabama Certified Farmers' Market which allows citizens to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables as well as other home grown/homemade items. A market of this kind can not only provide fresh produce to a community it also helps keep community dollars in the community and supports local farmers and small business. The location of Lincoln's market in the historic downtown also allows downtown business to showcase their products to market patrons.

Efforts should be made to support and grow the Lincoln Farmers' Market into a thriving and sustainable activity for the community. As with other programs and activities mentioned, there are a large number of farmers' markets across the State from which the organizers of the Lincoln Farmers' Market can get new ideas and learn the secrets to a successful market program. Additionally the State of Alabama's Farmers' Market Authority can provide advice and assistance with the management of a certified farmers' market.

Goals:

The Healthcare Committee identified four primary goals for inclusion in the City's Comprehensive Plan. Along with these goals have been provided recommended action items for which the City will need to formulate policies and programs to carry out.

HC-1. Provide, Expand and Improve Access to Healthcare.

- a. Look into providing Tele-Psych Access

- b. Explore possible ways to assist with transportation for Healthcare related needs. *Work with the Transportation Division of East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission and participate in the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Planning Process.*
- c. Provide easily accessible comprehensive list of existing healthcare resources and services throughout the region to residents

HC-2. Improve Communication and Increase Healthcare Education Opportunities.

- a. Create a Community Health Education Program. Involve schools, churches, social clubs/organizations and local physicians.
- b. Hold an Annual Health Fair.
- c. Provide classes on understanding how insurance works and how to read an insurance statement

HC-3. Provide Local Access to Fresh Food.

- a. Develop a Community Garden:
 - o Use as an educational Tool for Youth on healthy eating habits
 - o Supply Farmer's Market with fresh vegetables and allow youth to man booth – teaches responsibility and entrepreneurship.
- b. Work to attract more restaurants & groceries that provide healthy food alternatives.
- c. Work with schools to develop programs to educate youth on healthy lifestyles and making healthy choices.
- d. Encourage better, longer availability of Fresh Food (consider extending time of Farmers Market to include early spring and fall crops)
- e. Establish a Local Food Policy Council to promote and develop Healthy Eating, Healthy Lifestyles and Wellness Programs. Or work with Regional Food Policy Council, if one exists.

HC-4. Enhance Senior Services and Social Activities.

- a. Work with developers to provide housing options for older adults – assisted living is one option, but not the only one. Look into senior living communities or communities built with needs of seniors in mind.
- b. Work toward providing a stand-alone senior center that provides daily meals, exercise, transportation and Healthcare education.
- c. Create a senior mentoring program where seniors interact with youth.
- d. Develop a Health, Prevention and Wellness Program starting with Senior Citizens and expanding over time to include all adults.

¹Trust for America's Health – healthyamericans.org

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