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How 'social determinants of health' impact everyone [column]

DIANE HESS | SPECIAL TO LNP 2 hrs ago



Diane Hess is executive director of the Central Penn Business Group on Health, an affiliate of the Lancaster Chamber.

Every May the Central Penn Business Group on Health partners with LiveWell Lancaster to put on an annual health summit.

We began hosting this partnership event in 2012. Its purpose is twofold: to educate the business community and community resource organizations about issues affecting the health of our community and to put together a call to action to address deficiencies in resources or services going forward.

Over the years we have focused on smoking, healthy lifestyles, mental health, substance abuse, reducing stress and improving well-being. We also take the time to recognize those employers that have gone above and beyond to create a healthy work environment for their employees — providing them with tools and resources to help them either improve or maintain good health.

We are fortunate that we have so many employers willing to go the extra mile to help their employees with these challenges.

This year's event will focus on the social determinants of health, which are the economic and social conditions that influence individual and group differences in health status. They are the health-promoting factors found in one's living and working conditions, rather than individual risk factors that influence the risk for a disease or vulnerability to disease or injury.

At first glance, this does not appear to be a topic that would be of interest to the business community. But when you begin to examine the impact that the social determinants already are having on the average worker in Lancaster County, it becomes very apparent that we need comprehensive, community-based solutions.

In a county where many employers are struggling to find good employees, we are learning that solutions to the problems caused by these social determinants are a business imperative.

Consider this. If you have an employee earning \$25 an hour, that translates to \$52,000 a year. Sounds pretty good, right? But by the time you take out taxes, payroll deductions for health insurance and retirement, pay the baby sitter and the rent, and then buy groceries there is not a lot left.

If you also take into consideration that in 2018, the average deductible for a single person, according to the annual benefit survey conducted by the Central Penn Business Group on Health and the Lancaster Chamber, is \$2,429, how is a person with a chronic medical condition supposed to pay for the care they need?

The answer is that many of them are not getting the care they need.

According to a recent survey conducted by 20|20 Research in partnership with CarePayment, 64 percent of patients reported that they have delayed or neglected care within the past year because their medical expenses would be too high.

Additionally, 61 percent of patients said they have no money saved for high medical expenses. Cost and other social determinants are factors impacting the health of the region's workforce.

If an employee does not have good transportation, he might not be able to get to necessary appointments as scheduled. If he cannot afford to pay the rent for better housing, he may live in a place that exacerbates his health conditions. And if English is his second language, he may not understand what he needs to do to maintain his health.

Solutions to these issues do not come easily, but the potential for improved health and reduced health care costs make the need for solutions crucial to our goal of improving health for those in our community.

We hope you will join us this May as we attack this topic with insights from a nationally recognized keynote and insights from our community leaders.

• *Diane Hess is executive director of the Central Penn Business Group on Health, an affiliate of the Lancaster Chamber.*

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