



Social Services Capacity Survey Spring/Summer 2018

In spring 2018, the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts led an assessment of social service organizations capacity and practices in relation to the current MassHealth Accountable Care Organizations. The goal of the survey was to gather information to inform planning and decisions to support the social service sector in Western Massachusetts region.

The survey focused on social service organizations' capacity, practices and resources with regard to service provision, referrals, service coordination, partnership and collaboration with healthcare providers, and program evaluation.

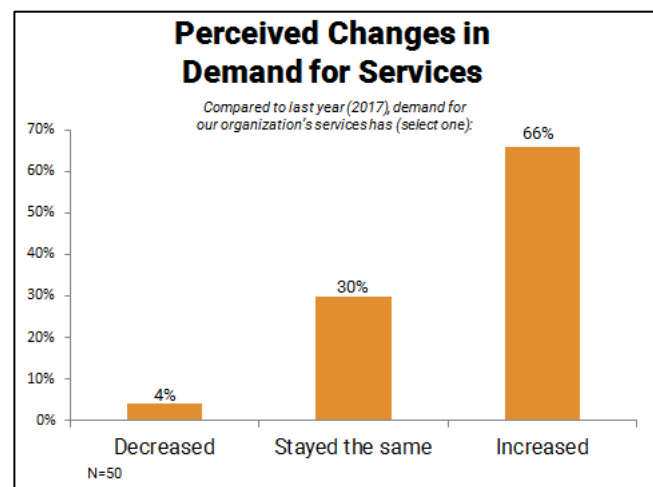
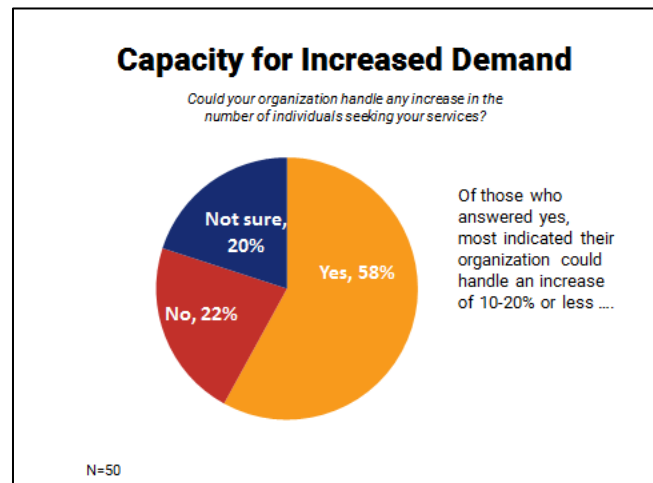
Key Findings

Capacity

Two-thirds (66%) of respondents have noticed an increase in demand for services since last year. They reported a limited capacity to increase services with the majority (58%) reporting they could handle a 10-20% increase and one-fifth reporting no capacity to increase services. A large number (42%) report waitlists for services.

Learning and Communicating

Social service sector leaders noted that health care and social service provider cultures differ, which has implications for future coordination and collaboration. They suggested ways to bridge this divide including trainings to understand the new healthcare landscape, being "at the table" with healthcare leadership, and working together as equal partners to explore opportunities.



Specific Strategies for Collaboration:

- *Inter-provider communication platforms.* 61% of survey respondents expressed interest in bi-directional platform. Social service agencies need help developing systems to share client/patient information securely while meeting confidentiality guidelines.
- *Shared community resource database.* 76% of respondents expressed interest in community referral database. However, interview participants noted that this would need dedicated funding and staff to be kept up to date in real time.
- *Impact of social services on health.* Over 60% are interested in capacity building to identify health outcomes their services may impact.

While ACOs are implementing care needs screening tools, these generally do not ask about current reality of what services are being used by the patient and there is a still lingering need to understand how a more effective screening system could be built across organizations and sectors.

Key Policy Concerns

Transportation was identified as a barrier across the board. In addition, there was agreement on the need for combined universal enrollment in services, such MassHealth and SNAP, streamlining this process for patients/clients.

Opportunity for Action

Social service providers are interested in improving the effectiveness of interactions with healthcare. Intentionality is needed to create systems with a shared vision. Respondents recommended that systems should be built on existing efforts.

Methodology

The assessment included stakeholder interviews, group facilitated discussions and a survey sent to area social service providers. Stakeholder interviews were foundational for survey development and provided deeper insights that illuminated survey findings.

There were 62 respondents employed with social services agencies including 29 Food

Insecurity/Nutrition and 25 Housing Instability/ Homelessness agencies. Respondents represented all four counties in Western MA with the majority serving Hampden and Hampshire Counties.

Special thanks to The Food Bank of Western MA and the End Hunger Coalition as well as the Western MA Network to End Homelessness. We are grateful to the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation for funding this important effort.

