

Public Health – Muskegon County

Case Study: New Jail and Juvenile Transition Center Health Impact Assessment

Background:

The Muskegon County Jail is fifty years old. The jail was originally built for 200 inmates, but an annex added in 1999 increased capacity to 370. The current average daily population often exceeds 400. In 2007, the county hired an architectural firm to write up plans for a new jail. The following year, the county approved language to include a millage on the ballot. In 2009, the board decided to remove the tax increase from the ballot because they believed the chances of it passing were poor. In 2010, the County Commissioners considered the jail one of their top priorities.

Concerns surfaced about the Muskegon County Juvenile Transition Center (JTC) (then called the Juvenile Detention Center) in Dec. 2009. The facility was cited for improper restraining techniques, overuse of seclusion and understaffing. Since then, the county undertook sweeping reforms. The JTC's superintendent resigned and three staff members were fired. As a result of the investigation, county officials were ordered to respond with corrective action plans. The process led to many changes, including a change in focus toward treatment, staff training, an increase in staff and the elimination of certain disciplinary techniques.

Some time since 2006, county officials and JTC staff created a report (undated) focused on the future needs of the facility. In that report, they predicted a new juvenile facility should have 40 – 48 beds, 24 – 32 of which should be for secure detention, with 16 for treatment. One alternative being considered is to create a combined juvenile/adult jail facility with the ability to increase capacity to 1200 over the next 20 years.

Currently there is no identified funding for the proposed facility, however the County is moving forward with the planning process. They are currently in the site selection phase of the process and are considering 11 different sites for the proposed facility.

Decision-makers and Decision-Making process:

The County Commission has assembled a group of select commissioners, the county sheriff, the public health officer, a past sheriff, and a former commissioner to serve on a Jail Juvenile Transition Center Commission (JJTCC). This group is informed by the Citizen's Review Committee (CRC), a group composed of 9 county residents appointed by all but two of the county commissioners from among voters in their district. The CRC's primary purpose is to inform the community of the plans and the need for new jail / juvenile transition facilities, with the hope that this will increase broad-based community support for the plans. This group can inform the JJTCC, but ultimately does not have the power to vote on the proposals. Another committee, the Health Impact Assessment team, has been formed to provide input at different decision points along the process to help inform the JJTCC, looking at the decisions through the lens of health.

The JJTCC has a Gantt chart depicting timelines for various decisions and actions along the process, but in sum the decision making points where the HIA could be used are:

- To provide input into site selection

- To provide input into site design at various stages (through selection of a pre-architectural firm, an architectural firm, and the construction contractors).
- To provide input on services provided at the site
- To provide indicators for monitoring

The JJTCC has the ultimate power to recommend the plan to the Board of Commissioners, who will approve implementation of the plans. Depending on the funding process, the voters of Muskegon County may be the ultimate decision-makers.

Timeline:

- By July 31st, 2012: Phase 1 of the project includes site selections, creation of the Citizen Review Committee, exploration of financing options, and the public outreach plan. It culminates with a recommendation to the County Board for site and financing. Phase 1 is slightly behind schedule.
- By mid-October 2012: Phase II involves selecting an architect and project/construction manager.
- August 2012 – December 2014: Phase III will include the design of the new facility
- October 2013: Construction is scheduled to begin.

History of Concerns:

Historically, inmates and their families have been concerned about the deteriorating conditions in the jail, leading many to question why millions of dollars should be allocated to the same people who have maintained the current jail so poorly. The new jail planning also coincides with a state-appointed emergency manager taking over a high school in a school district inhabited by predominately urban youth of color. Residents question why there is no money to fund their future by educating children, yet a new and larger jail can be built with such little community input.

One major concern is the loss of City of Muskegon tax revenue if the Muskegon County Jail is relocated outside of the city limits. At least one County Commissioner has advocated that the facility be built in his/her district, presumably for the jobs potentially generated in constructing, running and maintaining the facility.

Agencies that provide services to inmates are, for the most part, enthusiastic about the creation of a facility designed with the treatment needs of inmates in mind and the opportunity for the expansion of programming and services.

Main Research Question:

- Is it better for health to co-locate juvenile and adult facilities or separate them?
- Is video visitation / court hearing better or worse for health than in person, and under what circumstances?
- Is it better or worse for health to locate a jail / juvenile facility in a neighborhood? (Impact on crime, property values, local government revenue, etc.)
- What facility design is optimal for the health of the inmates, workers and community?

- Where do treatment services for substance abuse and mental health issues prevent the most crime and offer the best outcomes for health issues for youth and for adults – services offered in the community or services offered in a jail facility?
- Which services in jails are the most health-protective?
- What is the right size for the jail / juvenile transition center, given population trends, incarceration rates and planned services?

The HIA will focus on the provision of treatment services. The team will compare the public health impacts of investing the necessary resources in creating a jail that facilitates treatment or moving further upstream by devoting resources instead into education, job training and other prevention programs, as well as diversion programs that can be completed outside of the jail setting.

Environmental & Social Determinants of Health to Consider:

Unemployment
 Race
 Income
 Pollution
 Environmental Hazards (based on site selection)
 Access to services and quality of services
 Crime (as a social determinant for injuries)

Stakeholders:

JJTCC
 CRC
 Muskegon County Jail inmates and their families
 Neighborhoods where facilities may become located
 Muskegon County residents
 Human service agencies that provide services to inmates
 Muskegon County Jail employees and their families

Resources:

Muskegon County Jail website: http://www.muskegonsheriff.com/support_java/countyjail.htm
 JTC website: <http://www.co.muskegon.mi.us/juveniletransitioncenter/index.html>
 Public Health – Muskegon County, two staff members trained in HIA
 Human Impact Partners
 Motivated HIA team members from agencies & representing public
 Funding for HIA consultants coming from Community Mental Health, Juvenile Transition Center and Public Health – Muskegon County