



COMMISSION ON THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH SYSTEM

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Central Brooklyn is medically underserved and does not have enough healthcare services. Many residents of the communities in Central Brooklyn have poor health status, chronic conditions, and problems in accessing services that they need. There is a clear need for additional community-based primary care. However, the need for community-based primary care is not a substitute for full service hospitals that provide emergency, inpatient, and specialty outpatient care.

The summary below of a community health needs assessment, points to many of the problems that residents face, the need for additional services and the barriers to care that already exist in these neighborhoods. Closing a hospital or reducing the services it provides would only exacerbate an already troubling situation. The survival of Interfaith Medical Center is challenged because of their bankruptcy status and the potential merger with The Brooklyn Hospital Center.

There are no guarantees that Interfaith will stay open as a hospital for Central Brooklyn.



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**The Need for Caring in
North and Central Brooklyn**

The hospitals in North and Central Brooklyn were targeted in an official committee set up by the Governor and the State Health Commissioner to review their financial viability. The Berger Committee (named after its Chairman, Stephen Berger) reviewed all of the hospitals in Brooklyn, looked at their 'bottom lines' and made recommendations that included: merging Interfaith and Wyckoff with Brooklyn Hospital as the lead; merging Brookdale with Kingsbrook as the lead; closing the hospital beds at Downstate and moving them to

Long Island College Hospital; closing Kingboro Psychiatric facility; and closing 1,200 hospital beds in the borough.

In response to the Berger Committee report, a community health needs assessment, *The Need for Caring in North and Central Brooklyn*, was prepared by three partner organizations with academic back-up, to assess the needs, barriers, and gaps in access to health care services in 15 zip codes in North and Central Brooklyn. These communities have long been designated as medically underserved areas and in need of more equal treatment, with low-income, immigrant and communities of color, and serious health problems. The neighborhoods in this assessment are: Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bushwick, Brownsville, Crown Heights, Cypress Hills, East Flatbush, East New York, Flatbush, Fort Greene, Prospect Heights Williamsburg. In addition, the communities of Downtown Brooklyn, Gowanus and Greenpoint were included since they lie in the catchment area of The Brooklyn Hospital Center. The assessment was funded by: the State Health Department, the foundation at Interfaith Medical Center, and The Brooklyn Hospital Center.

Field surveys and focus groups were used to capture the voices of community residents. Six hundred forty four residents were surveyed and nine focus groups were organized to capture the voices of special populations that would not be found in the survey. The surveying was done by community-based organizations familiar in their communities, so that there was a level of trust and willingness to participate.

The population. The zip codes surveyed are largely communities of color. Over 80% of the population is Black, including African- Americans and Caribbean. 22% self-identified as Latino/Hispanic and nearly 40% of respondents are immigrants – these statistics resemble the residents of these districts. There was targeting of lower-income residents, based on income and family size. Nearly half of respondents in this survey are unemployed and based on a household size of 4 or less, 81% of respondents have an income of \$66,000 or less.

- Many of the people surveyed, 73%, said that all members of their household have health insurance. More than half, 52.4% are covered by public health insurance including: Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and Family Health Plus.
- The most highly reported illnesses are: high blood pressure/hypertension (25%), asthma (20%), diabetes (16%), and hearing or vision problems (15%).

Access to Care: The services residents surveyed had the most difficulty accessing were: dentist, doctor/nurse, OB/GYN, pediatrics, and mental health.

- More than 85% of residents surveyed said it would be most convenient to receive care near where they live and only 8.7% of respondents said they visited hospitals outside of Brooklyn.

Barriers to Care included: waiting too long to get an appointment (13.5%), no health insurance (12.2%), waiting too long at appointments (9.6%), the cost of care (9.1%), and problems with insurance (7.6%).

Emergency Room usage: Nearly half of respondents said they visited the ER in the last 2 years and the most often-cited reasons were for asthma and high blood pressure. Both of these conditions can be treated on an outpatient basis if care is available.

- More than half of the residents surveyed who used the ER in the last 2 years have Medicaid. Of all the race/ethnicities surveyed, African-Americans were the highest percentage of ER users (56.5%) in the last two years. More than half of the Latinos surveyed, 52.5% used the ER in the last two years. The highest percentage of residents surveyed who used the ER, live in these zip codes: 11221 (Bed- Stuy), 11212 (Brownsville), 11216 (Bed-Stuy), and 11207 (East New York).

People were asked three open-ended questions on the survey and some of the types of responses received are shown below:

“The struggles and predicaments of low income families and children in poverty is a never ending story. We struggle with bad eating habits, lower birth weight infants. We need farmers markets, whole foods, fruit stands, vitamins, dental care, etc.”

“More affordable clinic put more clinics in our neighborhood. Low income communities need more educational services, preventing obesity because obesity is affecting our communities.”

“There needs to be more of everything so you don’t have to go out of the neighborhood.”

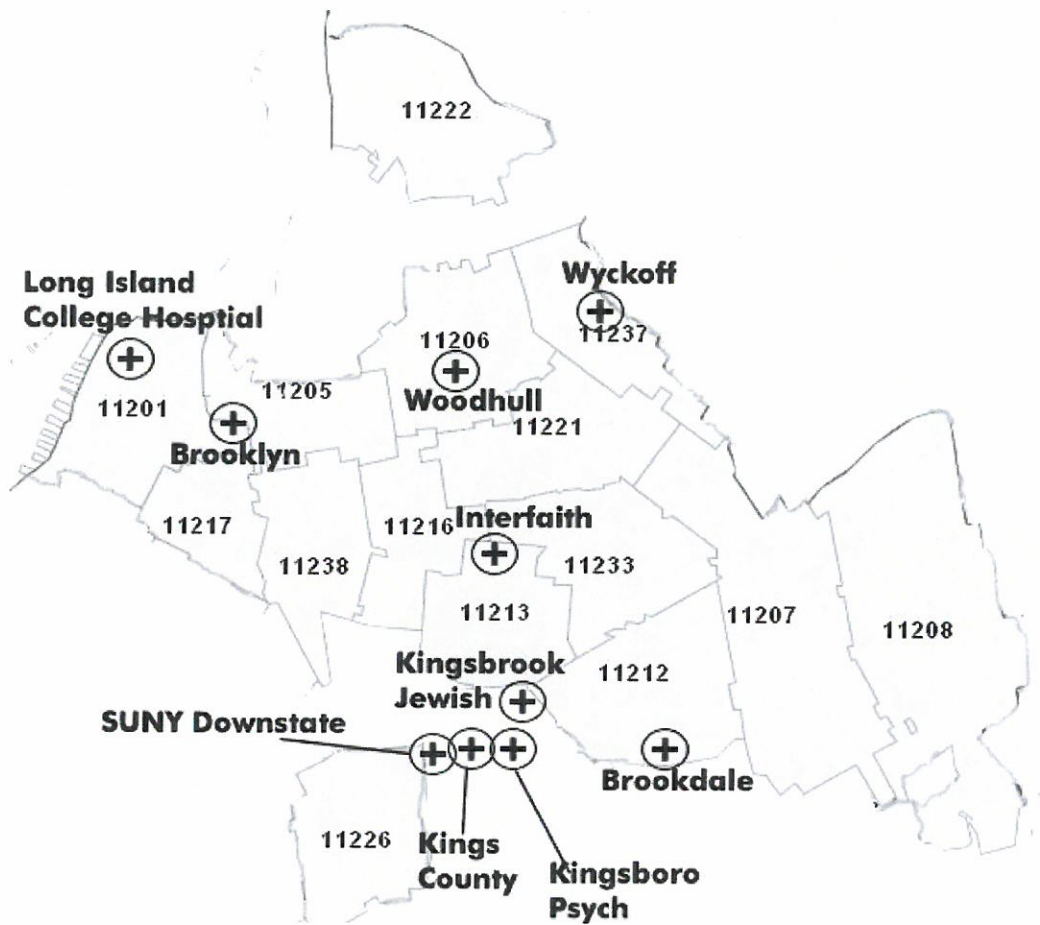
“I have to travel with my children to get medical care because I don’t speak English.”

“I feel so depressed now, no job, no health insurance, no medication, and there is no mental health doctor who will understand me and help me in this area.”

“The neighborhood needs a community low income based clinic for the underprivileged (sic) with working hours between Monday and Saturday.”

Findings & Recommendations based on the surveys:

- Brownsville (11212), Cypress Hills (11208), Bushwick (11237) and Bedford Stuyvesant (11221) had the highest prevalence of asthma, based on residents surveyed. Medical care is needed, but alone cannot fix this condition. We recommend conducting an air quality study to identify triggers.
- Put more pediatric providers in Prospect Heights (11238) and Bedford Stuyvesant (11233).
- Findings indicate that the following health conditions were prevalent and often the reason cited for emergency room visits: asthma, diabetes and hypertension. These illnesses were particularly prevalent in Bushwick (11237), Brownsville/East Flatbush (11212), Cypress Hills (11208) and Bedford Stuyvesant (11221). In addition, 11207, East New York, needs special attention. Also, attention needs to be focused on providing comprehensive, continuous primary care in these communities for these conditions.
- Provide more dental services in Bedford Stuyvesant (11221), Bedford Stuyvesant/Ft. Greene, Williamsburg (11206) and Cypress Hills (11208).
- Develop a coordinated campaign to outreach to and work with primary care practitioners, health clinics and managed care plans to encourage and increase the number of providers who accept public health insurance. This campaign should cover North and Central Brooklyn and be especially targeted on Bedford Stuyvesant (11216 and 11221) and Brownsville/East Flatbush.
- Develop a process to engage community residents (“community advisory board”) to work on why people aren’t getting the primary care services they need, such as over-use of Emergency Rooms. Communities to pay special attention to are Bedford Stuyvesant (11221 and 11216) and Brownsville/East Flatbush (11212)
- Three communities are identified with the highest number of residents surveyed not using services in their neighborhood: Bedford-Stuyvesant (11221 and 11216), Prospect Heights (11238), and East New York (11207). A review of the availability, or acceptability, of services in these communities would be helpful in determining why residents are going outside of their community for care.



Summary prepared on March 13, 2013 by: Commission on the Public's Health System, 45 Clinton Street, New York, NY 10002. 212-246-0803 www.cphsnyc.org