

Buffalo Meeting Transcription and Summary

What is Working Well in Buffalo

- Collaboration and Specialty Care: The region has strong collaboration between Buffalo and Sheridan for cardiology and stroke care, supported by the presence of one of the state's few cath labs.
- Hospital System: The hospital systems in the Johnson, Sheridan, and Campbell County areas are considered progressive and provide high-quality services.
- Staffing: While still a challenge, staffing levels are considered better than in many other rural areas.
- Provider Teamwork: There is a great sense of teamwork and collaboration among local healthcare providers to meet patient needs.
- Local Businesses: The community benefits from having locally-owned pharmacies.
- Ancillary Services: Dental and vision services in the community are excellent, with timely access to appointments.

What is Not Working Well in Buffalo

- Mental and Behavioral Health:
 - There is a high suicide rate in Johnson County and a significant need for more mental health services.
 - A major challenge is the stigma associated with seeking mental health care.
 - There is a lack of "aftercare" services for individuals returning to the community following treatment.
 - The fear of being placed on an involuntary hold (Title 25) deters some people from seeking crisis care.
 - Hospital emergency rooms are not properly equipped to handle behavioral health crises, sometimes resulting in patients being held for months while awaiting placement.
- Staffing and Workforce:
 - There is a critical shortage of staff for long-term care facilities.
 - A primary bottleneck in developing new nurses and mental health professionals is a lack of preceptors available for hands-on training.
 - The high cost of living, particularly for housing and childcare, makes it difficult to recruit and retain healthcare staff.
 - Pay for healthcare workers in rural areas is not competitive enough to keep people in the community.
- Access to Care:
 - There are long wait times of three to six months or more for specialty care, including neurology, neurosurgery, pulmonary, and endocrinology.
 - Pediatric specialty care is difficult to access, with one community member citing a 14-month wait for an autism diagnosis. There is also a lack of services for children with feeding disorders.

- Many communities have become "maternal health deserts" with no local OB services.
- Financial and Systemic Issues:
 - Low reimbursement rates from Medicaid and Medicare negatively impact the financial viability of services, such as ambulance services.
 - Elderly residents are sometimes sold Medicare Advantage plans that prove to have inadequate coverage for serious medical needs.
 - Local pharmacies cannot afford to stock certain expensive medications due to insufficient insurance reimbursement.
 - The care system for the indigent population is underfunded, leading to patients receiving only "bare bones" care.
 - Inefficient or outdated software and paper-based systems create extra work for providers.

What Buffalo Needs

- Workforce Development:
 - Loan repayment programs and "workforce grants" are needed to help recruit and retain healthcare professionals.
 - Education for healthcare careers needs to be more affordable and accessible.
- Service Expansion:
 - The community needs more services for its elderly population, including in-home assistance and respite care to help people stay in their homes longer.
 - There is a need for more facilities and beds dedicated to dementia care.
 - A "middle ground" mental health facility is needed—a step up from outpatient care but less intensive than an involuntary hold at the state hospital.
- Education and Prevention:
 - In areas without OB services, ER staff need training and education to handle labor and delivery.
 - More funding and focus should be directed toward chronic disease prevention and public health education.
- Addressing Stigma:
 - Public communication campaigns and joint education from medical and mental health providers are needed to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness.
 - One suggestion was to create targeted mental health centers with neutral names (like a "Vet Center") to make people more comfortable seeking help.