Purpose:

The purposes of holding a community health forum were threefold: (1) with the Baseline Report completed by the North Slope Borough, we wanted to present the findings to the community so that we all have a better understanding of Atqasuk’s health, (2) use the information to start changes needed to address health priorities, and (3) discuss with one another how we can start that change, and exchange diverse ideas.

Attendance:

The Atqasuk Community Health Forum held on January 24, 2013, at the Atqasuk Community Center had approximately 15-20 attendees (a handful of children were also present). Doreen Leavitt, NSB Health Department Director, facilitated the evening’s agenda. Heather Dingman, Health Impact Assessment Project Administrator, presented findings from the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report, and Jeffrey Prater, Hospital Administrator for ASNA, updated residents on the status of the new hospital and upcoming changes.

Method:

The forum was setup using the community café model; three questions were asked to attendees, to whom they discussed with other attendees at their table; at each question, attendees would discuss as a group, and later present their discussions to the rest of the meeting participants as a whole. Children/youth were encouraged to participate. Ethel Burke, Atqasuk resident, provided translation to Elders.

Café Questions:

The questions asked were:

1) What does a healthy North Slope mean to you?
2) What assets does the North Slope have that encourages it to be a healthy community?
3) What do you think are the most important health issues we face as North Slope residents?

Between 10-15 minutes were given to each question.

Outcome:

Discussions from all tables were recorded into an online site, www.wordle.net. The site generated a picture of words that were used most often, with larger words representing words
used most often in discussions. Table hosts presented their discussions to the larger group as a whole at the end of the forum. A picture from the discussion is presented below.

The top five topics that were discussed at Atqasuk’s health forum are described below, and listed in order:

1. Resources/services within community
2. Social problems, i.e.: drugs/alcohol abuse, tobacco use, verbal/physical/mental abuse
3. Subsistence way of life/access to store with healthy foods
4. Health-specific concerns
5. Education

Resources/Services within Community
When the meeting participants were asked, “what assets does the North Slope have that encourages it to be a healthy community?” they responded with a laundry list of services and organizations that impact health positively in Atqasuk, such as running water, the health clinic and its providers, the City Recreation Center, and the North Slope Borough, just to name a few. This list was the most comprehensive out of all topics discussed.

Social Problems
“A social problem is a social condition or a pattern of behavior (such as substance abuse) that harms some individuals or all people in a society and that a sufficient number of people believe warrants public concern and collective action to bring about change” (Kendall, D. *Social Problems in a Diverse Society* (4th ed) Boston: Pearson, 2007, p. 4).

All three tables listed alcohol/drug abuse as one of the most important issues we face as North Slope residents, and one of the first to be listed by each table, when asked the question, “what do you think are the most important health issues faced by North Slope residents?”. Other issues listed included bullying, verbal/physical abuse, mental abuse, smoking, bootlegging, and chewing tobacco.

**Subsistence Way Of Life/Access to Healthy Foods**

Atqasuk residents rely heavily on subsistence foods. Concerns about having no grocery store in Atqasuk to purchase fresh, healthy foods to eat was brought up repeatedly by residents. A small local store provides canned goods and other non-perishable items, but a well-stocked store with produce and dairy products is needed, residents stated. Residents enjoy times of the year where subsistence foods are readily available, such as the annual Thanksgiving and Christmas feasts. According to the Baseline Health Analysis Report, approximately 1/3 of residents stated they didn’t have enough subsistence foods to eat during the year, and 100% of residents stated they weren’t able to get enough store foods to eat healthy meals during the year. Issues with obtaining healthy foods included the high cost of shipping to Atqasuk, and that items are often shipped spoiled. It was suggested introducing subsistence foods into the schools. Airfare is expensive, and residents usually have to travel to access healthy foods. The local airline used to provide free freight for food items but that no longer exists; residents would like to see this established again.

**Health-Specific Concerns**

Information from the Baseline Report suggests that Atqasuk adults are experiencing lower-than-average reported general health, with 34% of adults reporting fair to poor health, compared to the NSB overall, which was 16%. During the health forum, residents in Atqasuk voiced concerns about chronic conditions such as diabetes, cancer, obesity, and respiratory diseases. Other health-specific concerns included STD’s, FAS, FAE, sleep deprivation, dental hygiene, teen pregnancy and the increase consumption of soda and juice. Residents discussed the need for healthcare providers to address prenatal care in Atqasuk. Also, questions were raised about accessing extended care or cancer treatment in Barrow instead of Anchorage. An issue with subsistence hunting was raised, about having to travel farther to get caribou because of the recent helicopter traffic.

**Education**
Meeting participants expressed the importance of education – both in school and out of school, and the importance of passing on Inupiaq values in a school setting and at home. Ilisagvik College and the Kiita Program were listed as important resources for NSB residents.

**Other Topics**

Another topic frequently discussed focused around communication; the communication between the Barrow and Anchorage hospitals (inquiring about how the system works), between Elders and youth, between villages in the North Slope and between organizations involved with health, such as ASRC, NSB, ASNA, etc. This was also raised in the Barrow Forum, and is discussed in the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report.

**Next Steps:**

An agency meeting was held previous to the evening meeting in Atqasuk, with a majority of City of Atqasuk staff/Board members present. The issues and concerns raised at this meeting mimicked the evening forum, and they are discussed above. One action item that came from the agency meeting was suggesting a collaboration between Atqasuk and Barrow on a “Mommy and Me” or similar program in Atqasuk that is currently provided in Barrow. The possibility of using video teleconferencing and exchanging resources were suggested to get the program running. Atqasuk residents would like to incorporate Inupiaq values for this potential program, which focuses around parenting. Residents would like to have more events filled with activities for children and youth in Atqasuk, which not only provides physical fitness but is something that would motivate children and youth to move forward.

This report will be given back to the community, and it will be uploaded online on the North Slope Borough Health Department’s website with other community forum reports, found here:


Large-scale change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from isolated intervention of individual organizations; therefore, substantially greater progress could be made in alleviating many of our most serious and complex social issues if nonprofits, governments, businesses, and the public were brought together around a common agenda to create **collective impact**. Communities on the North Slope are diverse; therefore, each community will have its own set of priorities for health. The NSB will be traveling to the remaining villages to provide community health forums similar to this one, for the purposes outlined above.
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A gathering on health and well being