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 Barrow’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 Barrow Community Health Forum held on November 1, 2012 at Ipalook Elementary had approximately 50-60 attendees. Jayne Andreen, Alaska Division of Public Health, and Doreen Leavitt, NSB Health Department, facilitated the evening’s agenda. Heather Dingman, NSB Mayor’s Office, presented findings from the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report.

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 switch tables, with a different set of attendees. Table hosts were asked to ensure all table participants had voiced their ideas and comments, and wrote the main themes down.

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?

25 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 discussions that took place at each table varied considerably, yet there were common themes as well. After collecting each table’s discussion notes at the end of the meeting, common themes were highlighted and are listed below:

1. Social problems, i.e.: drugs/alcohol abuse, smoking, sexual assault, domestic violence, suicide
2. Cultural identity/spirituality/learning from Elders/language preservation
3. Education
4. Food security/subsistence way of life/healthy food
5. Communication/collaboration
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.).

Social problems were discussed at every table, and were the most commonly discussed issues throughout the evening. Participants voiced concerns about drug and alcohol abuse most frequently. Also discussed were concerns about the prevalence of sexual abuse and assault, domestic violence and suicide.

Cultural Identity
Cultural identity was the second leading most common theme discussed. This includes spirituality, learning from Elders, knowledge of cultural history, language preservation and passing on values and traditions. Inupiaq values form the foundation of health and well-being in our communities, and this was clearly evident at each discussion that took place.

Education/Youth
The third most common theme that developed revolved around education and more opportunities for our youth. The NSB has invested heavily in education, and educational attainment levels have increased considerably since 1980 (NSB Baseline Community Analysis Report, 2012, p. 41). Related to cultural identity is the growing Inupiaq Education Department with the North Slope Borough School District – programs are developed to promote the Inupiaq values, language, culture and history within our schools. However, discussions that surfaced focused on providing more for our children, such as counseling services and more activities.

Food Security
Food security is a major concern circumpolar wide, and the North Slope Borough is no exception. Concerns were expressed at the meeting about having enough food, healthy food, to eat. People talked about the importance of subsistence foods, and being able to subsist to provide for families, and eating less “processed” foods, which is commonly available at local grocery stores.

Information from the Baseline Report indicates that food insecurity among children can result in negative outcomes, such as more frequent colds, ear infections, greater incidence of hospitalization, and increased need for mental health services, to name a few. Results from the 2010 North Slope Borough Census indicates that food security is a major public concern in all North Slope communities.

Communication
When asked, “What does a healthy North Slope mean to you?”, participants brought up the need for better communication and collaboration among individuals, organizations and communities. Barrow is the regional hub to the North Slope, and consists of the largest population on the North Slope; as a result, there are a majority of organizations that are based in Barrow that also provide services to outlying villages. However, both in the interagency meeting and the community meeting, there were concerns expressed about the need to collaborate more effectively with one another as agencies, to prevent redundancy and duplication of efforts. Also, resources could be expended more wisely if collaboration existed.

Faith-Based Community and Local Agencies
There were many, many topics discussed; the aforementioned topics were just the most common themes that came from discussions from all tables. However, there are others worth mentioning. Participants discussed the importance that faith has in becoming a healthy individual, and that churches are an asset to the North Slope in providing a healthy community.

A number of local agencies were listed by participants when asked, “What assets does the North Slope have that encourages it to be a healthy community?” It is clear that there are resources available to the community by a number of agencies, and that the current infrastructure provides access to healthcare, education, and other services to Barrow residents. However, better coordination of services was expressed, as well as the need for better collaboration among organizations.

Next Steps:

A community health forum with local agencies in Barrow was held previous to the evening forum, on October 31, 2012, at the Inupiat Heritage Center. Representatives from different agencies were presented with the report findings and were asked to commit to the common goal of promoting health within our community. Health priorities, however, should come from the community, and thus an evening session was held to discuss what our priorities are as a community. The results from the evening session will be presented to agencies in a report, and follow up discussions will ensue to ensure health priorities are addressed in each of our organizations, for the common goal of promoting health. 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.¹
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 seven villages to provide community health forums similar to this one, for the purposes outlined above.