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 Nuiqsut’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:

Approximately 12 participants attended the Nuiqsut Health Forum at the Nuiqsut Community Center on April 9, 2013 at 6:30pm. Doreen Leavitt, NSB Health Director, facilitated the evening’s agenda. Heather Dingman, NSB Mayor’s Office, presented findings from the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report, and Jeff Prater, Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital Administrator, discussed upcoming changes and expectations with the new hospital, discussed how SSMH has been using the report findings, and answered questions regarding ASNA/SSMH issues.

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.

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?

10 minutes were given to each question.
Outcome:

Discussions from the group 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. A picture from the discussion is presented below.

After reviewing the group’s discussions, common themes were highlighted and are listed below:

1. Eating healthy: subsistence foods, healthy store-bought foods
2. Community gatherings, unity, working together
3. Health-specific concerns
4. Organizations and programs within community
5. Social problems, i.e.: drugs/alcohol abuse, smoking, suicide

Eating Healthy: Subsistence Foods, Healthy Store-Bought Foods
By far the most discussed topic amongst each group was eating healthy and having access to healthy foods such as subsistence foods and produce. Participants stressed the importance of teaching children how to hunt, trap, fish, and gather for their food, and passing on that traditional knowledge. Attendees noted that the Haul Road and Alpine both are beneficial to
the community in that they provide a means to access vegetables, fruits and meals. Still, there is limited access to healthy store-bought foods and that encourages an unhealthy diet. Nuiqsut was stated as being a great location for access to land animals, water fowl and berry picking. Whaling was often brought up as a means to access healthy food and a strong tradition within Nuiqsut.

Community Gatherings, Unity, Working Together
When asked, “What does a healthy North Slope mean to you?” participants listed various community gatherings that centered on the Inupiaq culture. Community events included Kivgiq, Nalukataq, Christmas/Thanksgiving feasts (sharing of subsistence foods), Inupiaq dances, Native Youth Olympics, Piuraagiaqta (spring festival), and 4th of July games. Discussion groups also listed having strong family support and being more involved with activities with children were important, as well as working together as a community and having unity.

Health-Specific Concerns
A list of health-specific concerns from attendees was similar to some of the emerging and current health trends that were presented earlier from the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report. This list includes issues such as cancer, respiratory issues, chronic health issues and the mentally ill population. There were discussions among groups about air pollution and industrial and residential pollution as well.

Organizations and Programs within Community
A list of organizations, programs and departments were given when asked the question, “What assets does the North Slope have that encourages it to be a healthy community?” such as the NSB Fire Dept, Search and Rescue, Health clinic, Water Plant, Police Dept, and both the Presbyterian and Assembly of God churches in Nuiqsut. Services like video teleconferencing were also listed, as it assists the community in providing behavioral health services from Barrow. Attendees also stated there were facilities that encouraged physical fitness, such as the gymnasium and weight room, but would like to bring back a sauna that they had once before. Service providers are assets to Nuiqsut; those that are ETTs, EMTS, and PHNs that provide immunizations to children.

Social problems, i.e.: Drugs/Alcohol Abuse, Smoking, Suicide
“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.).

A common theme among all communities thus far has stated that social problems are present on the North Slope, and Nuiqsut is among them. Substance abuse, smoking and suicide were
discussed among all groups as one of the most important issues faced by Nuiqsut residents. During the collective discussion at the end of the meeting, one participant stated that smoking needs to be addressed. NSB Health Director Doreen Leavitt stated that the NSB Health Department just received a grant to provide tobacco cessation services to North Slope communities, and outreach and educational materials will be sent to all communities soon. Findings from the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report shows that tobacco use among North Slope residents is high, so providing resources to address this issue has been a main objective for the NSB Health Department. An Elder and another participant at the meeting talked about their journey in quitting smoking, and another participant gave a strong message about the serious damage smoking can cause to a loved one.

**Next Steps:**

An interagency meeting wasn’t held for Nuiqsut because there were not enough participants to hold a meeting. During the evening forum, a presentation on the Baseline Community Health Analysis Report was given to attendees, and the community café model was used to discuss health issues by asking the three questions mentioned above. Smoking cessation is among the priorities for Nuiqsut and the NSB Health Department will work with the community in providing resources and services for Nuiqsut residents.

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 three villages to provide community health forums similar to this one, for the purposes outlined above.

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Report

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A gathering on health and well being