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Critical Condition:

Examining the Scope of Medical Services in South Los Angeles

The decision by Los Angeles County officials to close Martin Luther King Jr. – Harbor Hospital (King/Harbor), following several inspections citing serious quality of care issues and the subsequent loss of federal funding, is a striking blow to the people of South Los Angeles, and indeed, the entire county. The establishment of this facility was intended to provide critically needed medical services in a community that historically has suffered from some of the worse health conditions in the entire county.

DEFINING SPA 6

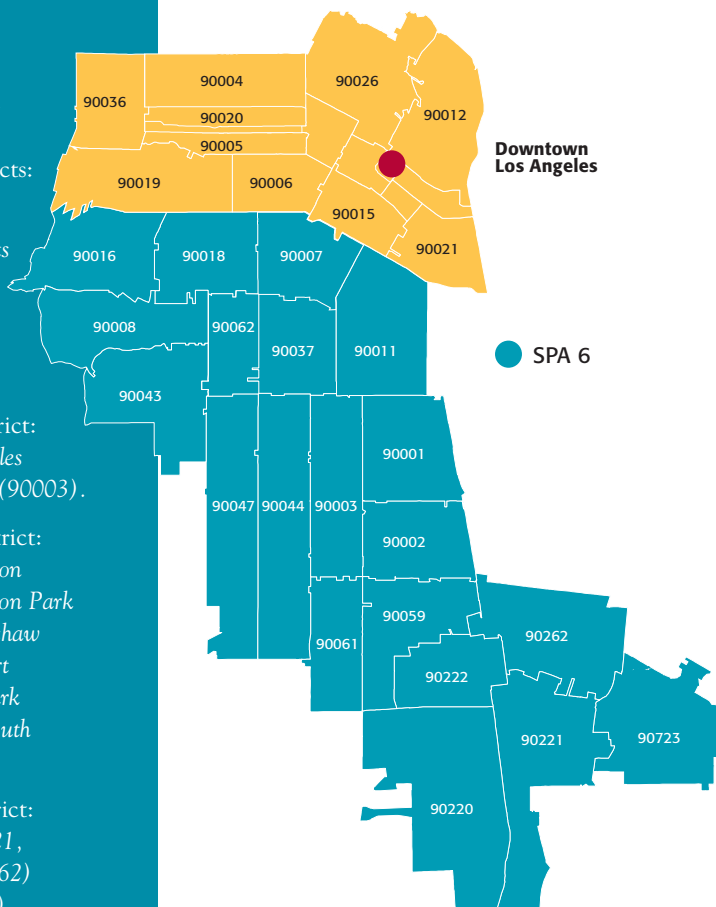
Los Angeles County's Service Planning Area (SPA) 6 is divided into four Health Districts:

South Health District: Florence (90001), Watts (90002), Willowbrook (90059) and West Compton/Los Angeles County (90061).

Southeast Health District: South Central Los Angeles (90011) and Humphry (90003).

Southwest Health District: Adams (90016), Jefferson Park (90018), Exposition Park (90007, 90037), Crenshaw District (90008), Leimert Park (90062), Hyde Park (90043, 90047) and South Vermont (90044).

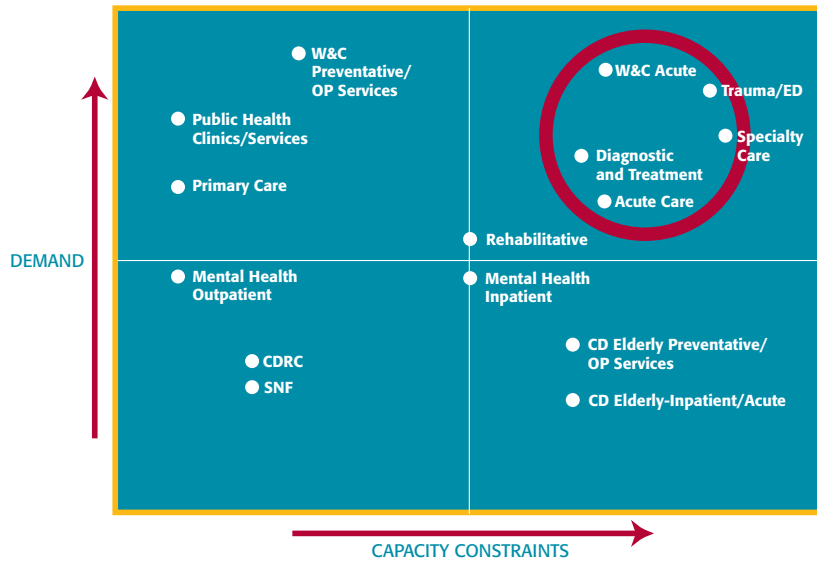
Compton Health District: Compton (90220, 90221, 90222), Lynwood (90262) and Paramount (90723).



Now, as the future of health care delivery in South Los Angeles hangs in the balance, a new report provides a timely analysis of the health needs and health care capacity of South Los Angeles.

This executive summary highlights the most salient findings found in the report, *Critical Condition: Examining the Needs of Medical Services in South Los Angeles* (the complete report can be found at www.calendow.org). Through careful, detailed compilation and review of existing data by government agencies, health providers and community-based organizations of the Service Planning Area (SPA) 6 geographic area, the report provides a comprehensive health picture of the South Los Angeles community to date. The analysis was designed to provide a common base of information which policymakers, health care providers, advocates and health consumers can develop priorities for action.

Chart 1: SPA 6 Qualitative Assessment of Medical Services*



KEY FINDINGS

Based on virtually every health indicator, the South Los Angeles area remains among the most disadvantaged and underserved communities in the nation. In SPA 6, more people die of lung cancer, stroke, diabetes, and heart disease than in any other place in L.A. County. Diabetes rates are 44 percent higher than elsewhere in the county, hypertension rates are 24 percent higher, HIV/AIDS rates are 38 percent higher, and asthma rates are 11 percent higher.

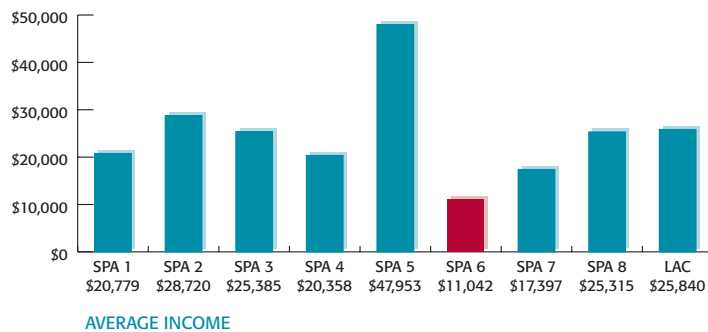
Furthermore, additional statistics show that SPA 6 is a community facing a dangerous existence with little economic opportunity. The homicide rate among South L.A.

adolescents and young adults (ages 15 to 34) accounts for 76 percent of deaths, and is an alarming 200 percent higher than the county-wide rate. And this population has the lowest socioeconomic status in the county, with a per capita income of just \$11,000 per year.

Overall, using health status as a predictor of health care utilization, it is reasonable to assume that the poor health status of the SPA 6 population will drive the increased need and use of medical services.

Unfortunately, these service needs are not currently being met, as revealed in the following findings:

Chart 2: Average per Capita Income, 2004



Source: Project, Citywide Gang Activity Reduction Strategy: Phase I Report (2006); Claritas 2004, Patient Assessment Survey III Final Report, Allison L. Diamant, M.D., MSHS for the PAS III Research Team (Data collected in 2005).

* The graphic is not intended to suggest that services falling outside the red target are not in need of continued resources. As the population ages, the demand for all medical services will increase and it is incumbent upon the necessary stakeholders to ensure services keep pace with this growth.

Emergency Room (ER) Services

- The diverse makeup and low-income characteristics of the SPA 6 population, coupled with the high homicide rate, indicates a relatively high demand for trauma and emergency services.
- In 2004, SPA 6 had the lowest number of emergency department treatment stations (59) per 100,000 residents, compared to L.A. County and other geographic areas. The current capacity of the 59 ER treatment stations is well below the estimated need of 100-150 stations.
- SPA 6 residents are forced to travel longer and farther to receive ER care at hospitals in neighboring communities thereby placing significant pressure on ER rooms that are already are overcrowded.

Inpatient Services

- In 2005, residents in SPA 6 were the highest users of inpatient services compared to L.A. County and California (107 discharges/1,000 vs. 101 discharges/1,000 in California).
- Yet, SPA 6 residents have limited access to inpatient services. Based on current utilization patterns, SPA 6 needs an estimated 2,000 hospital beds. Prior to the closure

of King/Harbor, there were approximately 1,000 existing beds, and since the closure, there are approximately 700 beds. In terms of hospital beds per 1,000 residents, SPA 6 ranks among the lowest regions in the country. Nationally, the average is about three beds per 1,000 residents; California has an average of 2; West Los Angeles has about 4, and South Los Angeles has about 1 bed per 1,000 residents.

Outpatient and Specialty Care

- 40 percent of patients in SPA 6 do not have a usual source of care, which is twice as high as the county rate.
- SPA 6 residents are routinely forced to wait longer than other L.A. County residents to get an appointment for care at a doctor's office or clinic.
- The wait times for receiving specialty care at county facilities is six months to one year (according to community clinics that primarily refer patients to the County Department of Health Services for specialty care).
- SPA 6 has the highest utilization rates of county-funded ambulatory care visits by uninsured adults.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Based on virtually every health indicator, South Los Angeles residents experience worse health outcomes when compared to their counterparts county wide.
- In South L.A., more people die of lung cancer, stroke, diabetes and heart disease than in any other place in L.A.
- South L.A. residents are forced to travel longer and farther to receive ER care at hospitals in neighboring communities.
- South L.A. residents are routinely forced to wait longer than other L.A. County residents to get an appointment for care at a doctor's office or clinic.
- The wait times for receiving specialty care at county facilities is six months to one year.

Chart 3: Emergency Department Treatment Stations per 100,000 Population, 2004



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- The SPA 6 population shows a need for all diagnostic and treatment services including inpatient and outpatient surgery, general radiology and ultrasound.
- SPA 6 continues to have the highest percent of adults unable to receive dental care compared to other areas.
- Prenatal, mental health, rehabilitation and elderly services are also lacking in SPA 6 when compared with other areas of the county.

Public Health/Preventive Services

- In general, most adults in SPA 6 report having poorer health compared to the rest of Los Angeles County. They are more obese, less physically active and eat fewer fruits and vegetables per day.
- SPA 6 also had the highest mortality rates for cardiovascular disease, diabetes and stroke compared to all other SPAs.
- In 2005, SPA 6 adults reported the lowest percent of adults receiving flu shots compared to other SPAs and Los Angeles County.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings portray a broken health system that has failed to meet the needs of South Los Angeles residents, even prior to the closure of the King/Harbor facility. For a community that has the most severe and dire health conditions in Los Angeles County, it is alarming that availability of services is decreasing at a time when further investment is essential. Moreover, these findings suggest that

existing health services are not being coordinated effectively enough.

While the health of the SPA 6 population has been the most negatively impacted by these circumstances, the existing data indicates that the further erosion of services (such as the closing of King/Harbor hospital) will cause a ripple effect across the entire Los Angeles County health system—public and private. The lack of capacity in SPA 6 for critical services such as emergency and acute care has driven residents to seek care in surrounding hospitals, which further puts at risk an already fragile safety-net system that cannot handle more patients.

This analysis demonstrates that we must immediately rethink how to address these unmet needs. At a minimum, the South Los Angeles community requires a fully functioning, comprehensive hospital that delivers high-quality care. SPA 6 is in desperate need of greater access to inpatient and emergency room care, specialty services and better integration of primary care with mental health, public health and specialty care that is more responsive to the community's needs and demographics. These actions could serve as significant improvements and represent the core set of services needed for a stable health care infrastructure that provides a population-based, chronic-diseased focused model of health care delivery.

The restoration of inpatient services to the community should be viewed as a critical and necessary first step, but it cannot be the only step. Ultimately, we must launch a broad-based and comprehensive effort to address the broader issues that contribute to community health, such as economic opportunity, safety, nutrition, education and housing.