

Our Health

Examining Topics from 'Our Health is in Our Hands'

Inability to Access Prescribed Medication: an Access to Healthcare Issue

Access to healthcare is not just about health insurance and the number of available health providers. The inability to acquire prescribed medications can also hinder a person's access to healthcare. In this edition of 'Our Health' we will explore the issue of prescription medication access in the Capital Area and Ingham County.



Why is the inability to obtain prescribed medication a healthcare access issue?

Like it or not, medication is increasingly becoming a critical component of medical care. It is used to prevent complications of certain conditions, manage symptoms, and cure disease. The benefits of a visit with a clinician can be reduced or even eliminated if the patient is unable to adhere to the treatment plan. The uninsured, obviously have trouble purchasing prescription medications, but they are not the only ones. Many private health insurance plans, as a cost saving measure, either shift more of the cost of prescriptions to their beneficiaries or eliminate the benefit altogether. Therefore, clinicians cannot assume that their patients with health insurance have sufficient prescription medication coverage.

Healthy People 2020

There is a HP2020 objective associated with this measure:

Objective AHS-6.4 says we are to, "Reduce the proportion of individuals who are unable to obtain or delay in obtaining necessary prescription medicines."

The HP2020 target, based on data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)-AHRQ, is 2.8%.

How do we know about the inability to access prescribed medication?

In the Capital Area, information about the inability to access prescription medication comes from the Capital Area Behavioral Risk Factor and Social Capital Survey (Capital Area BRF&SC Survey). Adults who were selected to participate in the survey were asked, "Was there a time in the past 12 months

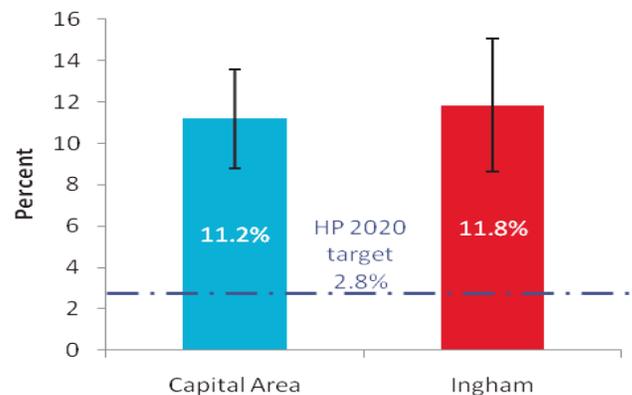
when you needed to have a prescription filled, but could not

because of the cost?"

What do we know about the inability to access prescribed medication?

According to the Capital Area BRF&SC Survey there are an estimated 40,441 adults, 11.2% of the population over the age of 18 years, who had difficulty obtaining prescribed medication in the past year (Figure 1). Most of these adults, 26,298 or 11.8% of the adult population, live in Ingham County. In both areas younger and middle aged adults were more likely to have trouble acquiring prescrip-

Figure 1. Inability to obtain prescription medication in the previous 12 months among adults in the Capital Area and Ingham County, 2008-2010

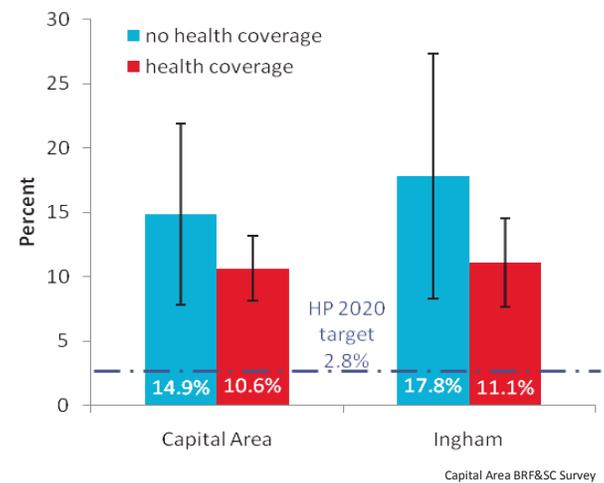


tion medication than older adults.

Between 2008-2010, approximately one in five adults under the age of 55 years had difficulty obtaining prescribed medication. Meanwhile, one in ten adults 55-64 years old reported experiencing the same problem. Among adults over the age of 64 years, the prevalence dropped even further. In that age group, only about one in twenty adults reported having trouble accessing their prescribed medication.

Previously we mentioned that it is no longer accurate to assume that persons with health insurance or health coverage have adequate prescription medication coverage. Figure 2 shows the percentage of adults in the Capital Area and Ingham County who were unable to obtain prescription medicine by health coverage status. Even with health coverage, approximately one in ten adults reported experiencing trouble acquiring prescription medicine.

Figure 2. Inability to obtain prescription medication in the previous 12 months among adults by health coverage status, 2008-2010



Prescription Assistance Resources

Below are a couple of resources if you or a client are looking for information about prescription drug assistance:

- MIRx (Michigan's Prescription Drug Discount Card): [<http://www.mihealth.org/mirx/index.html>]
- RxAssist [www.rxassist.org]: This site is sponsored by Volunteers in Health Care, a nonprofit, national resource center funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that provides assistance to programs serving the uninsured.
- Certain pharmaceutical companies offer drug discount cards. Based on the medicine needed, see the company's website for more details.

References

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2. Chevarley, FM. Percentage of Persons Unable to Get or Delayed in Getting Needed Medical Care, Dental Care, or Prescription Medicines: United States, 2007. Statistical Brief #282. April 2010. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD. http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/data_files/publications/st282/stat282.pdf

Published in 2004, **Our Health is in Our Hands** is a report of the health status of the residents of Ingham County. Not only does it document the traditional topics and behaviors related to health (i.e. physical activity, substance abuse, tobacco use, etc.), but it includes a review of the social determinants of health. Social determinants of health are factors in the social environment that contribute to or detract from the health of individuals and communities. Examples of social determinants of health, discussed in *Our Health is in Our Hands* are social connection, population shifts, and environmental quality. Copies of this document are available at <http://hd.ingham.org/publications.aspx>.

The **Capital Area Behavioral Risk Factor & Social Capital Survey** is a telephone health survey of households that collects information on health behaviors, preventive health practices, health care access, social cohesion and interactions. Modeled after the Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey and the national Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, information gathered from this survey is used to identify emerging health obstacles, monitor health objectives, and develop and evaluate public health policies/programs in Ingham and surrounding counties in the Capital Area.

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