

Will County MAPP Collaborative
2013 Forces of Change Assessment



Prepared by the Illinois Public Health Institute

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Introduction

In 2013, the Will County MAPP Collaborative convened to conduct the second iteration of the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) process. MAPP is a community-driven strategic planning framework that assists communities in developing and implementing efforts around the prioritization of public health issues and the identification of resources to address them as defined by the 10 Essential Public Health Services. The MAPP process includes four assessments, as shown in the graphic below.



MAPP Model, Achieving Healthier Communities MAPP User's Handbook
http://www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/MAPP_Handbook_fnl.pdf

One of the four assessments is the Forces of Change Assessment (FOCA). The FOCA is aimed at identifying forces – such as trends, factors, or events – that are or will be influencing the health and quality of life of the community and the work of the local public health system.

- **Trends** are patterns over time, such as migration in and out of a community or a growing disillusionment with government.
- **Factors** are discrete elements, such as a community's large ethnic population, an urban setting, or the jurisdiction's proximity to a major waterway.
- **Events** are one-time occurrences, such as a hospital closure, a natural disaster, or the passage of new legislation.

During the FOCA, participants answer the following questions:

- What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?
- What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these occurrences?

Forces to be considered should include the following categories of influence: (1) Social, (2) Economic, (3) Political, (4) Legal, (5) Environmental, (6) Technological, (7) Scientific, and (8) Ethical. The group is also able to add other categories that may be influential.

Assessment Methodology

The Will County MAPP Collaborative participated in the Forces of Change Assessment through a two phase process.

On September 19, 2013, the Will County MAPP Collaborative participated in the first phase of the FOCA. A neutral facilitator guided participants through the following process:

1. The components of the Forces of Change Assessment were reviewed.
2. Flip charts for each category of influence were placed around the room.
3. The participants divided into small groups and joined an initial category of influence.
4. Each small group brainstormed and listed relevant forces of influence and accompanying threats and opportunities.
5. After a specified period of time, the small groups moved clockwise around the room to the next category of influence flip chart, where they added to the previous group's ideas.
6. This process of review and expansion of notes was repeated until every small group had the chance to contribute ideas for each category of influence.
7. Participants rejoined their original category of influence and selected the most important forces within that category.
8. Participants came back together as one large group to discuss each of the categories of influence and to report out on each group's selection of the most important forces within their category of influence.
9. The facilitator asked the group about other forces that were discussed that they felt should be ranked as among the most prominent forces of change, and what forces of change did not surface in the assessment that should be included.

Following the initial compilation of Forces of Change by community members, the forces were combined into cross-cutting themes and a neutral facilitator guided the MAPP Executive Committee through the second phase of the process.

1. Cross-cutting themes identified in the community input phase were reviewed.
2. Committee members participated in a facilitated dialogue in which they identified additional forces.
3. Committee members then reviewed each cross-cutting force/theme and identified specific opportunities or threats to the Will County community and local public health system related to those themes.

Executive Summary: Core Issues Emerging from the Forces of Change Assessment

The Forces of Change identified in this assessment represent important issues affecting the local public health system in Will County, and their potential implications on the health and quality of life of county residents and on the public health system.

The analysis of the themes from all categories within the Forces of Change Assessment by community members and the MAPP Executive Committee produced 12 cross-cutting issues. These issues include:

- Economic and Social Equity
- Community Well-Being and Safety of Vulnerable Populations
- Community Cohesion
- Mental Health, Behavioral Health, and Substance Abuse
- Changing Workforce Needs
- Health Care Reform
- Environmental Health
- Increasing Use of Social Media and Technology
- Changing Demographics
- Increasing Collaborations and Partnerships
- Transportation
- Increasing Reliance on Faith-Based Organizations as Service Providers

These twelve cross-cutting issues will be described in detail on the following pages.

References to the critical role of social determinants of health¹ were threaded throughout the Forces of Change Assessment. Social and economic forces, including poverty, racism, and other structural disadvantages have a profound impact on the wellbeing and quality of life of all community members in Will County. Special consideration should be given to addressing these disparities to improve health and wellbeing for the most vulnerable Will County residents to achieve greater health equity and quality of life.

¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines social determinants of health as the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics.

Cross-Cutting Forces of Change in Will County

Economic and Social Equity

Socioeconomic disparities and inequities were a principle concern that surfaced throughout the dialogue during the Forces of Change Assessment. Inequity in educational quality and resources across the county was noted as a concern. Participants cited perceptions of unequal distribution of vocational and job-readiness training opportunities among different high schools as an example of educational inequity, which could lead to further inequity if differential access to vocational training results in future employment disparities when youth graduate and enter the workforce. Income disparities, the foreclosure crisis, growing food insecurity, the increasing cost of living, and disparate distribution of economic resources and opportunities across the county further contribute to social and economic disparities. Participants specifically pointed to disparities in distribution of economic and community resources between east and west Joliet and urban and rural Will County.

Community Well-Being and Safety of Vulnerable Populations

Related to trends in growing socioeconomic inequities, participants referenced several factors and trends that threaten overall community well-being, but disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, particularly youth, low-income families, and communities of color. Participants expressed concern about the impact of unequal distribution of community resources on children in low-income neighborhoods. Participants reported a lack of good schools, parks, and libraries in many neighborhoods, which they perceived as compromising neighborhood safety and putting youth at risk for exposure to violence. Participants also perceived elevated violence and crime throughout Will County, and expressed concern regarding the role of violence in community health, which may prevent community members from exercising outside if they feel unsafe in their neighborhoods. Feelings of being unsafe in one's community may also elevate stress, which can have a detrimental impact on physical health. Participants reported that it is important to explore the connections between the built environment, violence, and physical health and to determine how to effectively address the root causes of violence in the community. Participants suggested advocating for more equal funding across the community and exploration of the impact of current gun laws as potential opportunities to address this force.

Community Cohesion

Throughout the Forces of Change Assessment, participants referenced a broad spectrum of social and political trends that have been very polarizing in the community. Will County is perceived by many community members as having a strong religious and traditional heritage. Given this heritage, some community members have expressed concern regarding what they perceive as changing social and cultural values that threaten the social and moral fabric of the community. Throughout the community, there are vastly differing political and moral

perspectives about pending state and federal legislation, including employer mandates to provide contraceptive coverage to employees, legalization of gay marriage, legalization of medical marijuana, legalization of concealed carry, and immigration reform. While viewpoints on these issues are very complex, participants reported a broad sense of political division across the community, threatening community cohesion.

Mental Health, Behavioral Health, and Substance Abuse

Increasing incidence of mental and behavioral health issues and the lack of resources with which to address these problems were frequently cited as being among the most critical public health issues in Will County. Participants reported overburdened and under-resourced mental health services, as well as the lack of a mental health safety net for low income and uninsured individuals. Participants remarked that instead of funding a mental health safety net in Illinois, we instead invest in prisons to institutionalize individuals with mental illness. They also reported a shortage of mental health providers, noting that there are virtually no mental health providers in the county that accept Medicaid, meaning that Medicaid patients frequently need to travel to Chicago to seek services during a mental health crisis. While there are minimal resources to support mental and behavioral health in the community, Will County is currently experiencing a marked increase in need for such resources, with increasing suicide and substance abuse rates. Rising heroin use and incidence of death from accidental overdose are particularly troubling. Participants also expressed a concern with the use of tobacco and e-cigarette products, calling for more stringent policies and greater enforcement of existing policies that limit community exposure to secondhand smoking. They further called for laws restricting youth access to e-cigarettes, which are largely unregulated. Participants mentioned the need to encourage area schools to participate in the Illinois Youth Survey to generate data that will help the community better understand substance abuse patterns and other behavioral health issues.

Changing Workforce Needs

Participants in the Forces of Change Assessment expressed concern regarding Will County's readiness to adapt to the changing economy and job market. Participants perceive a lack of quality jobs throughout the community, noting the increasing prevalence of low wage employment, consistent with national trends. Participants called for the need to attract new industry to create good jobs for community members, but noted that there is a need for greater investment in job readiness training to make the community competitive in attracting new businesses. Participants expressed concern that high schools are not adequately preparing youth for the current job market, and post-secondary education is cost-prohibitive for many people, and creates high levels of student debt causing significant financial burden and negatively affecting economic growth. Participants also noted that the country's punitive prison system underemphasizes rehabilitation and skill development, and leaves incarcerated individuals unprepared to reintegrate into the economy when they are released, contributing to high rates of recidivism, which in turn negatively impacts the economy. Participants suggested that Will County can respond to this force of change by investing in strong vocational training

programs in local high schools, creating job readiness training programs for community members, and advocating for investment in education and vocational development programming in prisons so incarcerated individuals are more prepared to find employment and reintegrate into the community upon release.

Health Care Reform

The Affordable Care Act was cited by participants as a prominent force of change for public health. Participants expressed concern regarding the implementation of legislation, including rollout of the insurance marketplace and Medicaid expansion. While insurance subsidies will make insurance accessible to people who could not previously afford it and increase access to health care, participants questioned whether the federal government's determination of expected personal contribution should actually be considered affordable. Participants also expressed concern that the public was not well-informed about what to expect during the rollout process, and the enrollment process may be difficult, especially for those without access to the internet. Participants perceived a broad range of concerns among community members related to uncertainties of the impact of health care reform, including fears that expanded access to health care may negatively affect quality of care across the health care system, or that the employer mandate will slow job growth. Participants also noted that this legislation also has the potential to reduce rising health care costs while improving the health of the public by placing greater emphasis on preventative care. The chief concern related to Medicaid expansion is that while more low income people will be covered and have the ability to access health care services for the first time, increasing the number of Medicaid recipients will exacerbate existing barriers to accessing care for current Medicaid patients, resulting from low reimbursement rates and a shortage of providers willing to accept Medicaid patients. Participants perceived that the Affordable Care Act legislation falls short in assuring that there will be a sufficient number of Medicaid providers, and suggested that this can be addressed by increasing reimbursement rates and creating provider incentives.

Environmental Health

Participants also expressed a broad range of concerns regarding environmental health in Will County. Among the most salient was environmental and safety concerns related to energy production in the community. Participants expressed concern regarding the impact of the local nuclear power plant on air quality, occupational safety, and community health, but noted that the plant is a valuable source of employment in Will County. Participants mentioned fracking as a source of energy that may be worth exploring, noting a potential to create new jobs, increase domestic energy, and decrease the cost of natural gas. However, participants also cited a number of serious environmental and health risks associated with fracking, including threats to the supply of fresh water, soil pollution, increased CO₂ emissions, and unknown long-term health consequences. Participants identified the need for public dialogue and assessments weighing the environmental, health, and economic impacts of bringing fracking to the area. Wind energy was another energy source mentioned, though participants reported that some Will County residents may not want wind turbines in their communities. Throughout dialogue

related to energy production, participants noted concerns regarding the lack of industrial regulation to reduce pollution and protect public safety. Opportunities presented by this force include calling for further research to allow the community to make educated decisions about bringing in new industries, advocating for increased industrial regulation, and advocating for investment in green energy sources like wind and solar power.

Environmental and health impacts of industrial agriculture were also cited as sources of concern. Participants mentioned the detrimental effects of agricultural “run-off”, which compromised water quality across the state. Participants also expressed uncertainty regarding the safety of genetically modified foods, identifying a need for further research and greater transparency regarding health impacts of these foods.

Increasing Use of Social Media and Technology

The trend toward increasing use of social media as a form of communication and entertainment was referenced throughout the assessment. Participants mentioned changing communication skills among youth as a potential threat resulting from increased reliance on texting and social media, perceiving weaker writing skills in students. However, participants also acknowledged that social media provides many opportunities to engage and communicate with the public to share information and health messaging. Smart phones and social media may be particularly useful for widely and rapidly communicating important safety information to the public in disasters or emergencies. An additional threat presented by social media is the increasing prevalence of cyber-bullying among youth, which can have serious implications for well-being.

Because technology skills will be increasingly important for youth to prepare for the future workforce, participants reported a trend toward greater use of electronics in education, with some schools providing iPads for each student. Participants noted, however, that technology resources are not distributed equally among schools in the community, contributing to disparities in education quality and investment across the community.

Changing Demographics

Throughout the assessment, participants cited changing community demographics as a significant force of change in the community, noting trends toward an aging, more diverse population. Participants noted that as the population in Will County ages, the community will need to develop a stronger infrastructure to support the needs of seniors. The community also must prepare for a significant portion of the population that is nearing retirement, identifying the need for succession planning. A significant opportunity presented by the large group of people exiting the workforce is the potential for highly skilled retired individuals to volunteer in the community. Participants called for greater engagement with networks of senior volunteers, like the Executive Service Corps, and creating opportunities for intergenerational mentoring. Participants reported that there is already a strong volunteer base in the county, but that they are a very underutilized resource that can be leveraged more effectively and significantly contribute to community improvement efforts.

Another significant demographic trend in Will County is an increasingly diverse population, specifically, a growing Latino population. While this growing population presents many significant opportunities for the community, participants also noted that Will County lacks the capacity to adequately serve non-English speaking populations and populations from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Will County can strengthen its support of diverse populations and better address their needs through cultural competency training for service providers across the county.

Increasing Collaborations and Partnerships

Participants reported a trend toward increasing collaboration and partnership across the community. Participants mentioned that widespread collaboration is a relatively recent development, but has been very beneficial in helping partners to share information and maximize resources. Participants called for continuing collaboration, but noted that partnerships take a significant amount of time and investment. They noted that reduced organizational capacity due to budget cuts is a threat to continuing collaboration, and cautioned against overburdening any partner in particular in order to maintain sustainable long-term collaborations.

Transportation

The potential development of the Illiana Expressway is a possible force of change that pose health, social, and economic implications for Will County. In particular, participants were concerned about the expressway's potential impacts on environmental health, workforce development, and community wellbeing as a result of trucking intermodals entering the area. Another aspect of the transportation system in the area mentioned in the assessment was limitations in area public transit. Bus routes are limited and transit fare was perceived by participants as being cost-prohibitive for low-income riders who rely on the bus system to access services and employment opportunities. Participants identified the opportunity to advocate for further investment in public transit to make the community more accessible for community members who cannot drive.

Increasing Reliance on Faith-Based Organizations as Service Providers

Participants perceived a trend toward increasing reliance on faith-based organizations to provide social services that the government has traditionally provided. This is a potential threat to these organizations, which may not have adequate resources to support expectations or their changing role as the provider of safety net services. This is also a potential opportunity because the faith community has an established history of being a trusted community partner. At the same time, this may be a potential threat for non-religious communities or populations who may perceive themselves as being stigmatized by faith communities, such as the LGBT community.

Conclusion

The Forces of Change identified by Will County Community Members and Will County MAPP Collaborative Executive Committee members in this assessment represent key issues that will have important implications for the Will County public health system and the health and quality of life of Will County residents.

The core issues that emerged as priorities in this assessment include:

- Economic and Social Equity
- Community Well-Being and Safety of Vulnerable Populations
- Community Cohesion
- Mental Health, Behavioral Health, and Substance Abuse
- Changing Workforce Needs
- Health Care Reform
- Environmental Health
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Results from the Forces of Change Assessment will be analyzed with the reports from the other three assessments in the MAPP process, which include the Community Health Status Assessment (CHSA), Community Themes and Strengths Assessment (CTSA), and the Local Public Health System Assessment (LPHSA). Strategic analysis of these assessment results will inform the identification of prevailing health issues, which will be strategically prioritized. Goals and action plans will be developed for each of these priority health issues. These action plans will be implemented and aligned to improve the local public health system and ultimately the health and wellbeing of the Will County community.

Appendix 1: FOCA Worksheet

Forces of Change Assessment Worksheet

The following worksheet is designed for participants to use in preparing for the Forces of Change brainstorming session. During the Forces of Change assessment, participants answer the questions:

What is occurring or might occur that affects the health of our community or the local public health system?

What are Forces of Change?

Forces are trends, factors or events that are or may be influencing the health and quality of life of the community and the work of the local public health system assessment.

- **Trends are patterns over time**, such as migration in and out of a community or a growing disillusionment with government.
- **Factors are discrete elements**, such as a community's large ethnic population, an urban setting, or a jurisdiction's proximity to a major waterway.
- **Events are one-time occurrences**, such as a hospital closure, a natural disaster, or the passage of new legislation.

How To Identify Forces of Change

As you brainstorm potential forces of change, use the questions below to help spur ideas of specific factors, trends or events that are or may likely affect the local public health system or community.

1. What has occurred recently or may occur in the future that will likely affect our local public health system or community?
2. Are there any trends occurring that will have an impact? Describe the trends.
3. What forces are occurring locally? Regionally? Nationally? Globally?
4. What characteristics of our county or state may pose an opportunity or threat?
5. What may occur or has occurred that may pose a barrier to achieving the shared vision?
6. During other MAPP activities or discussions, what potential threats or opportunities were discussed that should be considered?

What Kind of Areas or Categories Are Included?

Forces of change typically emerge in the following categories. For this reason, we have provided spaces on the following pages for you to think about forces of change that may be specific to each of these areas.

- social
- economic
- political
- technological
- environmental
- scientific
- legal
- ethical

Forces of Change Brainstorming Worksheet

Using the guidance on the cover page, list any ideas you identified as potential forces (trends, factors and events) under each category. If you identify a force of change that does not fit into one of the categories, list the force under the “other” category. For each force of change you identify, list the possible threat and/or opportunity posed by the force for our community or local public health system. If there is a force that you have a question about or think we may need to explore further, note the questions or needs in the final column. If you have more than 4 ideas per category and wish to add more rows electronically, go to the end of the last row in a category on the outside of the table and click enter. Please bring the completed brainstorm exercise to the assessment meeting on September 19th. If you have any questions, please contact Vanessa Newsome at vnewsome@willcountyhealth.org.

Forces of Change (Trend, Events, Factors)	Threats Posed to the LPHS or Community	Opportunities Created to the LPHS or Community	Questions/More Info Needed
Social			
Economic			

Political			
Technological			
Environmental			
Economic			
Scientific			
Legal			

Ethical			
Other			

Appendix 2: Priority Forces of Change Identified by Community Members

Following the identification of the Forces of Change listed above, participants identified and discussed leading forces of change in Will County, presented below.

Leading Social Forces of Change

- Loss of communication skills as a result of social media
- Increasing suicide rates
- Rising heroin use and accidental overdose
- Lack of individual and social responsibility
- Entertainment corruption and influence of sex, violence, and drug use on community norms

Leading Ethical Forces of Change

- Inequity in education quality across Will County
- Redefinition of marriage

Leading Political Forces of Change

- Uncertainties associated with the Affordable Care Act
- Lack of services and funding for mental and behavioral health
- Shortages of funding and mismanagement of funds locally and nationally
- Lack of policies to protect individuals with food allergies

Leading Environmental Forces of Change

- Water quality
- Safety of genetically modified foods
- Food deserts and food security
- Unsafe environments that prevent children from thriving
- Business responsibilities
- Second hand smoking

Leading Economic Forces of Change

- Lower standards of living due to growing income disparities
- Lack of quality jobs and job readiness training

Leading Legal Forces of Change

- Punitive prison system- lack of rehabilitation and skill development
- Need for better enforcement of smoke-free environments

Leading Scientific Forces of Change

- Medical marijuana/legalization of marijuana

Leading Technological Forces of Change

- Cyber bullying
- Smart phones and apps