

The Daily Sentinel (Grand Junction, CO)

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Time major health obstacle for minorities

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Time taken to see a doctor is time away from work, and that's time some minorities in Grand Junction don't think they can afford.

And the No. 1 time-waster often is travel, as people who don't have vehicles or licenses have to rely on public transportation, which may be inexpensive but isn't time-efficient.

"The transportation issue is really in crisis mode here in the valley," Teresa Coons, a research scientist and a member of the Grand Junction City Council, said Friday during a four-hour meeting with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Minority Health Care and Advisory Commission.

The meeting was held to get a sense of the health care issues minorities face in Mesa County. For residents with no other option than riding the bus, the travel crisis is a daily fact of life, Coons said.

"This is one of the biggest reasons a patient is a no-show," said Karla McCann of the Marillac Clinic.

The dilemma workers face is one of time, she said. It can take an hour and 45 minutes to go from Palisade to care centers in Grand Junction, then 20 minutes of waiting and filling out paperwork before seeing a doctor, she said. All of that time, including the time it takes for the return trip, is lost time from work.

And that, McCann said, is a problem for many.

Another problem discussed Friday was the isolation some minorities feel.

A sizable segment of Mesa County's minority population is migratory, Hispanic and working on farms in the Grand Valley, officials said.

"Probably 98 percent (of the 500 seasonal farm workers) are immigrants and Mexican nationals," said Dr. Amy Davis of the Marillac Clinic, which was established in Mesa County in 1988 to provide health care for low-income, underinsured and uninsured residents.

Many of these minority workers are isolated by cultural and economic barriers and hesitate to trust strangers, said Sandra Pratt, a medical professional with the Marillac Clinic. She said she spends time going to these workers' homes and visiting them.

"They get to know me; they let me into their homes," Pratt said. What she has found, she said, is a lot of isolation and stress. "They are alone at home. They don't have any family, and they don't know how to drive," she said.

Other factors mentioned Friday as health care obstacles included language barriers, housing, economics and racism.

The input the Minority Health Care and Advisory Commission received from local residents and health care professionals will help it make funding recommendations for the Health Disparities Grant Program.

Last year the Mesa County Department of Health was awarded a grant to reach out and communicate with the at-risk Spanish-speaking community. With the grant, the department was able to do things such as: educational television commercials; bilingual booths at 10 community events; numerous health screenings at churches, stores, work sites and other locations; and it served 619 Hispanics with screenings and/or education.

This year, St. Mary's Hospital was awarded a grant for an amount yet to be announced to combat diabetes among minorities.

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