Getting to the Root of Health Equity: 3/13/23 Community Conversation at GIAC

What are the most significant barriers to health equity in Tompkins County?

Structural Inequities
- Underrepresentation of marginalized populations in:
  - healthcare and leadership
  - community health assessments
  - decision-making: policies are created by people who do not have lived experience, which results in policies that are not inclusive
- Insufficient government action and funding to address social inequities
- Systemic racism and implicit bias in the healthcare profession results in medical mistrust which results in worse outcomes for patients

Access to Quality Health Care & Social Services
- Hours of operation: the times that medical facilities and other services like food pantries operate often limit access for individuals who do not have flexible schedules
- Physical location: services not always accessible, especially for people who live downtown or in rural areas
- Communication: Providers do not always explain things clearly, check for understanding, and involve patients in decisions. They are not always aware of community services available, are sometimes unwilling to accept feedback, and can get defensive.
- Language: materials are not translated, interpretation services not offered
- Shortage of mental health care providers
- Absence of robust relationships between the health system and community organizations (or between health equity advocates and healthcare providers)

Economic Stability
- Food insecurity
- Medical debt, out of pocket expenses, high cost of ambulance services
- Medicaid eligibility limits
- Lack of flexible funding resources for people in need
- Lack of childcare options

Neighborhood & Built Environment
- Housing: a lack of safe, centrally located, affordable housing, and limited options for safe emergency housing
- Transportation: options are limited, rendering many services inaccessible to those who could benefit from them most.
- Internet and cellphone service: unreliable or non-existent in rural areas, limits access to telehealth as well as to knowledge of available services and how to access them.

What are the most important actions needed for advancing health equity in Tompkins County?

Increase the presence of those most impacted by inequities in policy discussions and in the provision of care/services
- Provide childcare at community events to make them more accessible and thus increase the number of voices that are represented
- Center the voices of historically oppressed people: this can create opportunities for advancing racial equity in health policy
- Implement client/patient feedback systems
- Expand paid peer services: Provide a living wage for peer support services (e.g., healthcare navigation, financial literacy, understanding patients' rights, etc.). Unpaid volunteer roles keep those with relevant lived experiences from being at the center of the conversation and the solution.

Facilitate collective action and intentional collaboration
- Reprioritize organizational mission so that health equity is at the center
- Identify shared community goals and develop them into action plans
- Combine efforts to create the most impact with available resources
- Leverage existing structures (e.g.,Health Planning Council, Continuum of Care, Community Services Board, etc.) and data sets to row in same direction
- Encourage different people and organizations to come forward based on areas of expertise and lived experience - those most equipped to address a particular issue should be at the forefront
- Seek out joint funding to support collaboration
- Maximize impact via sustainable funding alternatives to grants
- Participate in public comment periods

Work with Tompkins County Legislature to address the social determinants of health
- Advocate for legislative protections around rent increases
- Increase on-demand, affordable transportation in rural communities

Improve access to quality health care & social services
- Expand service hours, specifically to include evenings and weekends; this could make many services more accessible to community members.
- Build interprofessional care teams
- Build awareness of available resources to facilitate the most appropriate referrals
- Eliminate outstanding bills as a reason to discharge patients.
- Advocate for expanded county mental health services
- Provide pediatric dentistry
- Address low health literacy: Ensure that patients are empowered and have agency in their care by communicating clearly and giving ample opportunity for patients to ask questions; Improve readability of education materials; Make translated resources available to anyone who needs them

Train and Retain a Vibrant Healthcare and Public Health Workforce
- Standardize best practices and build competency across all providers
- Facilitate access to Naloxone training and Mental Health First Aid training
- Address burn-out among care providers