

**Indiana Commission for Women
Hoosier INsight
Northwest Indiana Public Listening Session Report
Woodlawn Park, Portage, Indiana
Thursday, May 19, 2011
5:00-7:00 pm**

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Overview

On April 6, 2011, the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) staff received a letter from Rep. Mara Candelaria Reardon requesting that we offer a listening session in Northwest Indiana, which is the second most populous region in the state. In addition, on April 12, 2011, staff from the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) met with community leaders from Michigan City, Indiana, to discuss the possibility of forming a new municipal level commission for women. In addition to ICW staff, fourteen women (14) were present. During the discussion, ICW mentioned its statewide listening session project being used to better prioritize the issues affecting women and to begin establishing a statewide plan of action to address challenges currently being faced by women. The women in attendance also requested that ICW return to the area and conduct a listening session for the region. In planning for the session, ICW asked that the location of the listening session be in a central location that would allow anyone from the Northwest Indiana region to attend. Portage, Indiana, was chosen as the site of this additional listening session.

ICW held this public listening session on Thursday, May 19, 2011, at Woodlawn Park in Portage, Indiana. The time of the session was 5:00pm – 7:00pm in order to better accommodate individuals work schedules. The session started a few minutes late to allow for people who were coming from work and other prior commitments.

As a group, the participants identified nineteen (19) issues facing women in Indiana. By consensus, the group voted and determined that the top issue facing women that would be addressed during the listening session was: Access to health care. A second issue, services for high risk populations was also identified; however, the group decided to stay together for the full discussion. It was decided to focus on one issue only during the listening session to allow for a more robust discussion. An in-depth discussion of these priorities was completed with the participants. The group was asked to answer specific questions regarding their issue and to start developing a plan of action for addressing the issue in Indiana. The results of the discussions are detailed later in this report.

Participants

The Northwest Indiana public listening session was sponsored by Pat Boy, Michigan City Councilmember. She provided support by publicizing the session, getting information out to the community and providing refreshments for the participants. The session was promoted in a variety of ways. A notice was sent out to members of the original April 12 group and their networks. A press release for the session was sent out by DWD and by Ms. Boy and resulted in being picked up by multiple local news outlets. It was also sent out on the ICW listserv and social media outlets.

ICW utilized EventBrite to register participants. Nine (9) participants took advantage of the online service of which only four (4) registrants attended. However, a total of twelve (12) women attended the listening session.

Issues Identified

The participants of the listening session identified nineteen (19) issues they believed were barriers to women's full participation in society through a brainstorming activity. These issues were then voted on to determine the top two issues facing women in Indiana. Each participant was given three (3) votes that she could use to help prioritize the issues. The numbers next to the issue represent the number of votes that issue received from the participants.

Access to Health Care (10)

Finances (2)

- ~ Pay Equity
- ~ Meaningful Employment

Affordable and quality childcare (3)

Sexual assault kits processing

Equal representation in the legislature and on the bench (1)

Women veterans

Services for high-risk populations, e.g. substance abuse, mental health, etc. (4)

Senior women (2)

Lack of parenting skills (1)

Grandparents raising grandchildren

Affordable prescriptions (17 Progesterone) for high-risk pregnancy (2)

Affordable medications in general

Workplace environment issues, e.g. sexual harassment

Lack of facilities for mental health

Violence against women (1)

Immigration (ramifications of new law, regulations and fear of deportation)

Indiana Legal Services (1)

- ~ Need more for low income women
- ~ Better access
- ~ Family Law issues

Need for centralized resources and information

High school issues (2)

- ~ Aggressive girls
- ~ Developing positive relationships
- ~ Body image
- ~ Sex education
- ~ Self-esteem
- ~ Peer pressures

Top Issues & Discussion

The top issues identified by the participants were: 1) Access to health care; and 2) services for high-risk populations. The group decided to stay together for the full discussion so it was decided to focus on only one issue during the listening session to allow for a more robust discussion. After some discussion, the group agreed to focus on access to health care. Once these issues were identified, the participants were asked to consider a series of questions regarding these issues in order to start developing a plan of action for how we should work to

overcome these challenges in Indiana. The questions were divided into five categories and are listed below.

Frame It

1. What are the critical components of this issue?
2. What should be addressed first?

What's in Place Now?

3. Are there any existing programs in place to help solve this issue?
4. Are there any agencies or organizations who currently deal with this issue?

Who should be involved?

5. Who are the people/organizations that should be involved in this issue?
6. Who should be responsible for strategizing ideas and implementing solutions for this issue?

Community/State Actions

7. How can the community work on solving this issue?
8. Is this an issue that should be addressed statewide? How?

Next Steps

9. What resources are needed to work on this issue?
10. What are the next steps that should be taken to address this issue?

Issue: Access to health care

Access to health care was the top priority for participants of this listening session. There were ten (10) votes for this issue. The discussion of this topic is below.

Frame It

The participants identified the following main components of this issue:

- Issue of affordability and high deductibles
- Government intrusion in reproductive freedom
- Location is contributing factor based on where health care is available
- People who use ER for urgent care prevent those who need more medical attention from being seen
- Bureaucracy and complexity of whole issue, e.g. insurance, regulations and service resources
- Overwhelming comprehensive services
- Lack of focus on wellness and preventative care
- No benefit to healthy living, e.g. deductible reduction
- Lack of access to alternative or complementary health options, e.g. holistic medicine
- Planned Parenthood of Indiana is closing by June 30 – will create a void in services around wellness, education, STD prevention, contraception, etc.
- Insurance companies as problem
- Potential civil rights issue (division between “have and have nots” based partly on race, ethnicity, gender, disability)
- No safety net to help the most vulnerable – “Sad statement on how we treat the weakest in our society”
- Funding cuts will hurt
- Implications on workforce (no days off to tend to health issues; financial burden, etc.)
- So much responsibility is placed on women that they don’t take care of themselves

What’s in place now?

The participants identified the following programs/organizations that currently exist that provide some form of services.

- Planned Parenthood
- Phase out of Hoosier Insurance Plan (HIP) – confusion on where to go now
- Legislature
- HealthLink – seems to be currently overwhelmed in the area
- Churches
- Social services – receive individuals who are turned away from other points in the health care system (hospitals, ER, Urgent care) when they don’t know what to do with them.

Who should be involved?

The participants identified the following organizations/groups that should be involved to help to improve the situation that exists around this issue.

- Legislature that is informed and educated on the issues
- Citizens – need to be more engaged (finding newer ways of having their voices heard)

- 211 at the Library – community outreach and service providers
- Faith-based and community-based organizations
- Medical community
- Neighborhoods
- Child Protection Services (CPS) when it affects children
- Courts
- Coalitions
- Community Mentoring
- Government with proper representation
- Community and faith-based organizations
- Consumers
- Employers and their employees as consumers
- Elected officials in evaluating wellness
- Schools to understand how to provide healthy options
- Anyone who is passionate about the issues

Community / State Action

The participants determined that the following actions should be taken in order to help address the issues surrounding this issue.

- Actions need to be intergenerational and multicultural in scope
- Provide education (“as a society we have lost the family structure to educate parents”)
- Create service at hospital to ask simple questions (“Ask-A-Nurse” or “Doc in the Box”) on when to seek medical attention and when to wait
- Need some low cost solutions so that people have choices
- Help people to understand that it costs money to have services and that choices have to be made about how money will be spent
- Change attitudes and mindset of society
- Give elected officials the help they need to make informed decisions
- Average person/citizen needs lobbyists so that they can combat the lobbyists of the big health provider lobbyists
- Need advocates for resources and services
- Need more education about resources in language that citizens understand so that the issue is put into perspective in order to gain buy-in
- Bring hospitals and social services together in coalition for community outreach
- Need health advocates or social workers who will look after maternal health when the mother leaves the hospital
- Look at medical “monopolies” in community

Next steps

The participants determined that the next steps that need to be taken in order to begin making progress on this issue are:

- Understand what are the good programs in other communities and states
- Create a coalition to discuss Northwest Indiana-specific issues
- Offer networking
 - ~ Statewide
 - ~ Three-county network (Lake, Porter, LaPorte)
 - ~ Based on ISDH regions

- Hold regional Health Care Summits that creates action items
- Create a medical 211 for simple answers
- Educate citizens and get them involved politically (vote, meet with legislators)
- During legislative session, find groups to focus on issues and generate email blasts to educate on issues
- Outlaw drug commercials on TV

Conclusions

There are many barriers that create challenges to women in Indiana. The Hoosier INsight: Women’s Issues Listening Sessions project is the first step in starting conversations to help to address the challenges that women still face in our state. The results of all of the sessions held around the state will contribute to a report that will help to identify the top 3-5 issues that present major barriers to women in Indiana. These discussions are the beginning of a process to help move women in Indiana forward by engaging Indiana residents in public deliberation.

The Hoosier INsight project will help ICW continue to voice the needs, concerns, challenges, and viewpoints of women in Indiana. By better understanding the specific needs and desires of women, the commission will be able to better identify the ways in which they can help to remove barriers that hinder their participation in all areas of society.

A statewide event will occur once the results of the listening sessions, as well as the supplemental online women’s issue survey, are compiled. ICW will facilitate a statewide debriefing effort that will guide key community partners and stakeholder to synthesize the results into a shared statewide action plan. It will be ICW’s opportunity to inform the community on the primary issues affecting women regionally and statewide that were identified during the listening sessions; to expand coalitions and build capacity to work across networks and to improve outreach efforts on multiple issues.

* Summary Report Disclaimer

This summary report was prepared as an account of key issues, challenges, and suggested solutions described during a public discussion sponsored by the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) and supported by local partnering organizations in conjunction with its *Hoosier INsight: Women’s Issues Listening Sessions* initiative. The compilation of this summary report is provided as a courtesy and should not be considered in any way as an endorsement or promotion by the Indiana Commission for Women, by the State of Indiana or by ICW’s partners and supporters. Opinions expressed are strictly those of session participants and not necessarily those of the Indiana Commission for Women, of the State of Indiana or of its partners and supporters. Recommendations from this meeting, together with inputs received from other sources, may inform the creation of a final report and potential plan of action to address the issues and challenges discussed as well as potential future ICW initiatives, programs and services. Furthermore, ICW may use information obtained from this meeting and from the results of this initiative to offer suggestions to other agencies, organizations or entities better suited to address particular issues and/or challenges uncovered during this initiative in order to facilitate maximum cooperation and collaboration between ICW and other entities. The Indiana Commission for Women and those associated with the agency do not assume any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any comment made or of any third party’s use or results of such use of any information contained in this summary report.