



# Socorro County Health Assessment

June 19, 2014

FY 2014 PO # 0000108742 – Department of Health

By: Isaac Burleigh

## **About SCOPE**

**SCOPE Vision:** Socorro County: A Safe and Healthy Community.

**SCOPE Mission:** We will work together

- to provide a method for community health decision making,
- to identify and prioritize health and safety needs, and
- to establish and plan strategies for community health goals

for the improvement of the health and quality of life in families and individuals of Socorro County.

The purpose of SCOPE is to:

- Collaborate with community partners and members in achieving their mission.
- Assess community health needs.
- Identify health improvement priorities.
- Identify current community assets.
- Forward information about funding opportunities and resources.

Members of the coalition come from various health institutions and organizations in the community and use the coalition to increase communication and coordination in community events and programs. SCOPE's current priorities include:

- **Fitness and Nutrition:** The Healthy Kids Socorro County (HKSC) grant is a grant that is aimed at mitigating the problem of obesity. This program continued the efforts around Fitness and Nutrition that the health council began prior to 2007. Some initiatives include: bike to school days, school gardens around Socorro, trails and walking spaces in Socorro as well as creating way finding signs to encourage cycling in the community.
  - In addition to these projects HKSC conducts a "5210" program for all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders. The program challenges kids to eat 5 fruits and vegetables a day, have less than 2 hours of screen time a day, exercise 1 hour or more a day, and drink plenty of H2O.
  - Bountiful Baskets is another program dealing with nutrition in Socorro County. This program ships fresh fruits and vegetables at extremely affordable prices twice a month to Magdalena, a town that hasn't had a grocery store for two years. There are currently efforts under way to bring Bountiful Baskets to Socorro.
- **Substance Abuse:** While not an explicit priority of SCOPE, it has been in the past and continues to be an issue of importance to the council. The council recognizes that there are other community programs that address substance abuse such as the DWI Program, Socorro Mental Health, Alamo Behavioral Health, and the Ministerial Outreach.
  - The Socorro County Prevention Coalition (SCPC) was established early spring of 2014 and is currently in its planning and development stage. The SCPC will

begin implementing programs in Socorro County January 2015 with the vision of reducing substance abuse through environmental strategies.

- Juvenile Justice: The Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) was designed to positively impact and enhance the lives of Socorro County youth and prepare them for positive adulthood. The JJB has met with the Socorro Consolidated Schools superintendent and changed the school attendance policy requiring parents to provide a signed letter for their children's absences. Teen Court is another program developed by the JJB, Teen Court gives students a chance to be tried in a court of their peers before being brought to the District Attorney. The JJB is also responsible for bringing the new Teen Center to Socorro and is currently working on a new truancy protocol.

Groups that also work with SCOPE include:

- ICAN, a county extension program through New Mexico State University that does nutrition education work with both youth and adults.
- Socorro General Hospital Community Based Programs, which does one-on-one diabetes consults, "Circle of Security" parenting classes, home visitations for expecting families through when the age of 3, early intervention for children from birth to the age of 3, and also runs "Heritage" an intensive outpatient mental health service for senior adults.

### **Introduction and Purpose**

In January 2014 a health profile of Socorro County was released. The main focus of the profile was health factors but also included measures of community demographic and economic factors. In this profile the rates of Socorro County were compared to the rates of the state of New Mexico. Factors in which Socorro County did better and where Socorro County did worse were then put in an easy to read "Profile Highlights" document to use in community engagement (See Article 1). The purpose of this assessment was to create a discussion of the contributing causes of health challenges in Socorro County and to give guidance for SCOPE (Socorro County Options: Prevention and Education) on what health priorities should be in the coming year.

### **Methodology**

In order to gather community input a survey was created that showed where Socorro County was doing worse than New Mexico and asked participants to rank which factors were the biggest problems. The survey also asked which contributing factors to health would most improve the health challenges. A final question asked participants to identify assets or resources in the community that could be used to improve community health (See Article 2 for Survey). In total 140 of these surveys were completed.

Using the health profile in engaging communities was a process that began in March 2014. It was important to gather feedback from a diverse sample of Socorro County community

that could represent the county as a whole. To complete this various events were attended and different areas of the community were canvassed.

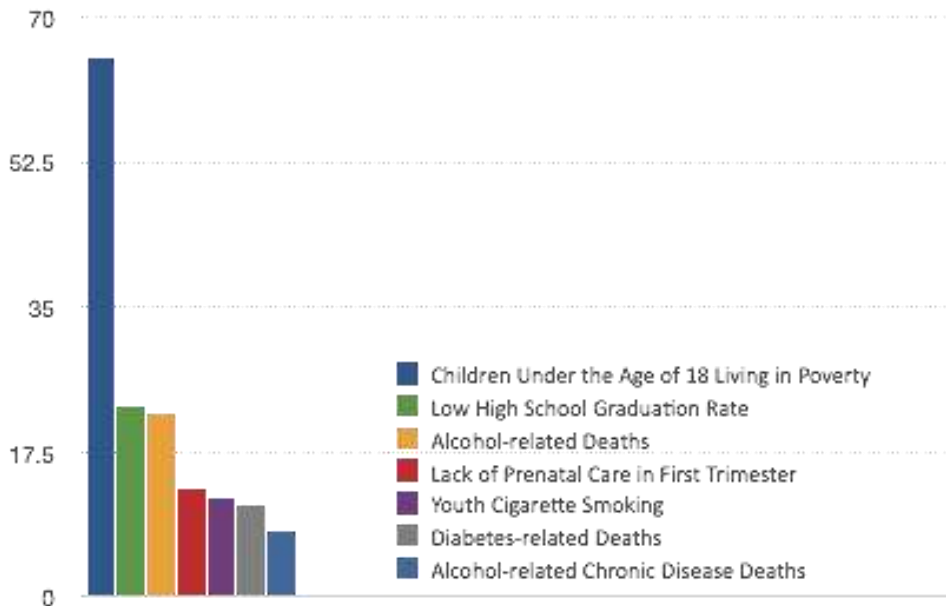
- **March:** The Profile Highlights were presented at the City Council meeting on 3/17, Profile Highlights were also put on the city's website.
- **April:** The Profile Highlights were distributed at the Family Fun Fest on April 26<sup>th</sup> the Socorro CYFD sponsored health fair, one on one surveys were completed with community members/ participants to gather feedback on the profile. Also in this month an online survey through Survey Monkey was created that presented the Profile Highlights and gathered feedback.
- **May:** A mass email to SCOPE members and their email lists distributed the Profile Highlight and gathered feedback. This email reached a diverse group of people including the faith based population and members of the Alamo community.
  - Profile Highlights were distributed and feedback was gathered at:
  - Bountiful Baskets in Magdalena.
  - Community Arts Party in Veguita, Northern Socorro County.
  - Community Health Fair in Magdalena.
  - At a local secondhand store.
  - At a focus group conducted amongst teachers at a local school.
  - Canvassed three very economically different neighborhoods in Socorro.

In addition to meeting with these groups the director of Birthright (an organization for women facing unplanned pregnancies) was met with as well as a group of New Mexico Tech professors. The sample from which these surveys were collected from represent the diverse population that makes up Socorro County.

## Data Analysis and Results

In analyzing the survey results there were inconsistencies in how the weighted questions were answered. To make the results clear the results are arranged by which health issue was rated most often the biggest problem to which was rated least often as the biggest problem.

- 1) Of the Health issues where Socorro County performed significantly worse than NM, which issues do you believe are the biggest problems?  
(1 is the most important 2 is second most, 3 is third, and so forth)



Participants of the survey selected the following health issues as the most important in Socorro County.

- Children Under Age of 18 Living in Poverty: 65 responses
- Low High School Graduation Rate: 23 responses
- Alcohol-related Deaths: 22 responses
- Lack of Prenatal Care in the First Trimester: 13 responses
- Youth Cigarette Smoking: 12 responses
- Diabetes-related Deaths: 11 responses
- Alcohol-related Chronic Disease Deaths: 8 responses

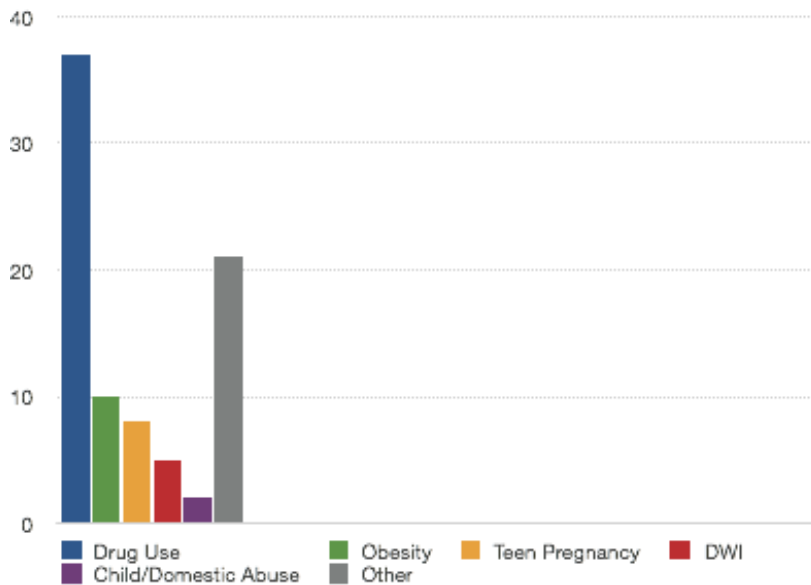
Results indicate that the Children Under Age of 18 Living in Poverty was perceived as the most important issue in Socorro County followed by Low High School Graduation Rate and Alcohol-related Deaths.

The Census Bureau defines poverty as, “if a family’s total income is less than the family’s threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty.” A family’s threshold varies by the age of family members and the amount of people in the family. In Socorro County 40% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty (4). According to the Census Bureau in 2012, a quarter of the general population lived below the poverty line (1). In Socorro County more than 50% of the household incomes are below \$30,000 (2). In Alamo poverty is the most severe with 70% of families living below the poverty line.

Information on the Profile Highlight for Socorro County Graduation rates was from the 2010 school year, newer data on the 2013 Epidemiologist Profile showed that the percentage high school graduates 25 and older was only 32%(1).

The 2013 Epidemiologist Profile of NM on alcohol related deaths show that there were 78.5/100,000 alcohol related deaths (2007-2011), which was higher than the state rate. Alcohol continues to be a problem in Socorro County as new data reports that 14.9% of youth have begun drinking before the age of 13(3).

2) If you feel there are other health issues (not listed above) please list them here.



83 participants gave responses to this question.

- Drug Use: 37 related responses.
- Obesity: 10 related responses.
- Teen Pregnancy: 8 related responses.
- DWI: 5 related responses.
- Child/Domestic abuse: 2 related responses.
- Other: 21 responses related to the lack of mental health support, limited health awareness in Socorro County, lack of resources, the water quality, city infrastructure, and the absence of a health clinic in north Socorro County.

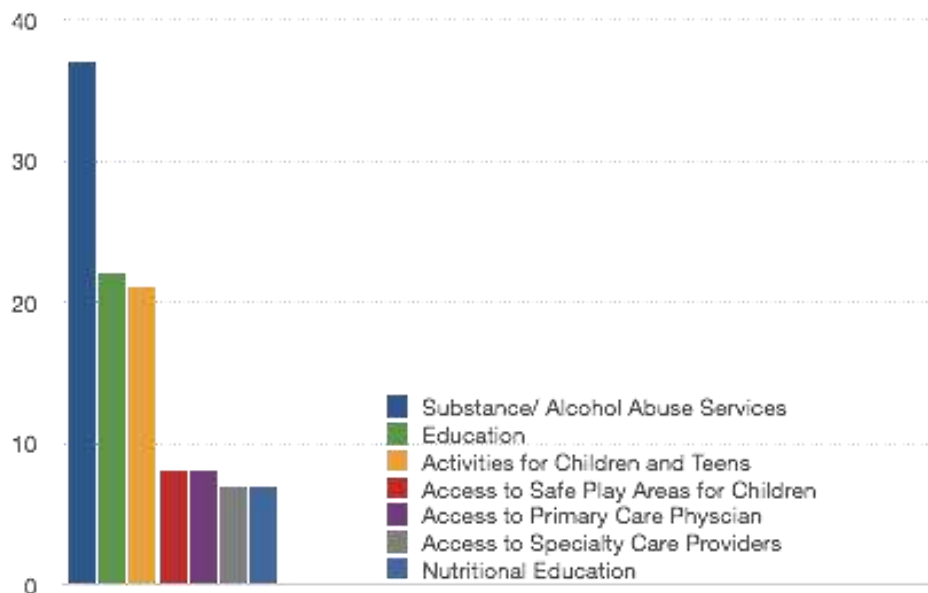
Concerns to drug use identified methamphetamines, heroin, and prescription drug abuse as the main drugs being used in Socorro. Other concerns were related to the ease people have obtaining drugs, the lack of persecution when drug use is reported, and the crime related to drugs. Another area of concern was the amount of drug overdoses. Information on drug use shows that prescription drugs have been used to get high by 4.4% of Socorro County students 6-8<sup>th</sup> grade and 8.6% of 9-12<sup>th</sup> graders. Both of these rates are consistent with state rates (3). Drug induced deaths in Socorro County are also consistent with the state rate, a rate of 24.4/100,000 deaths from 2008-2012(3).

Obesity in Socorro County has been documented in self-reporting surveys. In the Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey for students 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade 29% reported having a BMI above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for age and sex. Amongst adults in the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, another self-reporting survey, 75% of reported being obese (1).

Data indicates that from 2008-2012 there were 220 births to teens (15-19yr olds) accounting for 18.2% percent of the births in that time (1).

There were 221 accepted reports of child abuse between July 2012-June 2013 (1) validating the concerns that child abuse is a health issue in Socorro County. Rates of domestic abuse could not be identified with the sources available.

3) What do you believe would most improve the health of our community?  
(1 is the most important, 2 is second most, 3 is third, and so forth)



Survey participants selected the following topics as most important in improving community health in Socorro County.

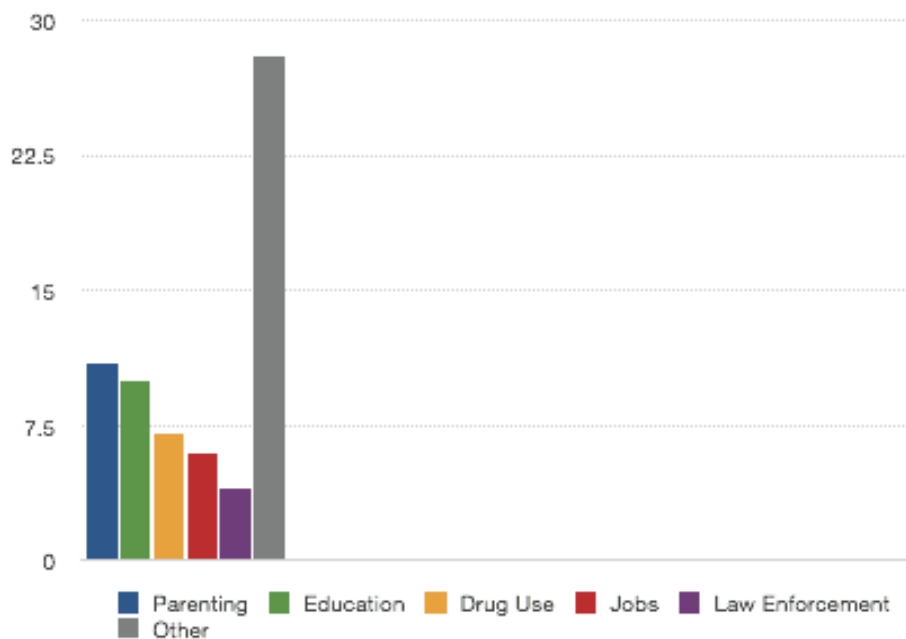
- Substance/ Alcohol Abuse Services: 37 responses
- Education: 22 responses
- Activities for Children and Teens: 21 responses
- Access to Safe Play Areas for Children: 8 responses
- Access to Primary Care Physician: 8 responses
- Access to Specialty Care Providers: 7 responses
- Nutritional Education: 7 responses

Substance/ Alcohol Abuse Services were perceived as being the most important in improving community health. This corresponds with drug abuse being the most answered health issue in Question 2. Current substance/ alcohol abuse services in Socorro County can be found at the PMS Community Health Center, Socorro Mental Health, the DWI services, and Puerto Seguro.

Information shows that 20.5% of populations 25 and older have not graduated high school; only 32% of the total population has graduated high school (1).



4) If you feel there are other contributing factors to our community health (not listed above) please list them here.



Survey participants selected the following topics as most important contributing factors to our community health.

- Parenting: 11 related responses.
- Education: 10 related responses.
- Drug Use: 7 related responses.
- Jobs: 6 related responses.
- Law Enforcement: 4 related responses.
- Other: 28 responses that included concerns about transportation, healthy food options, counseling services for teens, more positive youth clubs, activities for families, and more people valuing life.

Responses that referenced parenting stated that there needed to be more parenting classes for new parents, especially those for fathers. Better parenting was considered to be the biggest factor in improving community health. There was also concern about the amount of single parent households in Socorro County, 5% of households are under a single male, 14% are under a single female, and 291 grandparents that were responsible for children under the age of 18 (1).

Education responses included references to the need for more literate families, more education on healthy eating and lifestyles. An increase in tutoring services for children and teens that could be easily accessed was seen as needed. Also more early in home education, parents who can read to their children and help with math. Other concerns were that education should be made more relevant for young people, more vocational choices should be offered at high school, and these choices should be introduced at the grade school level.

Several participants made note that the drug treatment centers in Socorro had worked well in their experiences, having more treatment centers was seen as a factor that would help improve community health.

Responses that referenced that more jobs were needed in Socorro County and that there was a need for more economic growth in the area.

Many participants saw that there was a need for more law enforcement officers in the streets to handle the drug problem more seriously. Participants also saw that there was a lack of faith in law enforcement in Socorro County and having more officers be involved in community events and service they could improve their image in the community.

Transportation in Socorro County participants saw as in need for improvement. Many thought that more public transportation would help as well as more bike lanes to make cycling in the city safer and encourage the healthy activity of cycling. Other responses saw transportation needs for people going to Albuquerque to receive health care. In a 2011 Community Needs Assessment 1 in 4 rated distance as a barrier to care and 1 in 5 rated lack of transportation a barrier (2).

Responses citing food and nutrition as a contributing factor to community health noted that there was a need for an increased availability for fresh produce and more healthy food options. Participants also felt that an increase in cooking classes would help community member become more familiar with preparing healthy meals for their families.

5) What are assets or resources in our community that we can use to improve our community health? Responses included:

- The City of Socorro was one of the most common responses for this question. Many people found that Socorro had excellent parks and that Finley Gym provided a great place for youth to find activities and local sport leagues. Finley Gym is also host to the new Teen Center that provides life skills classes as well as tutoring services. The City of Socorro also offers summer employment for Socorro youth; this program helps kids develop professional work skills.
- The Socorro Consolidated School District: Teachers have the most contact with youth in Socorro besides the actual parents. If people were able to come into the schools to volunteer and be healthy positive role models in student life's it would be a benefit to the general community health.
- The Farmers Market and Bountiful Baskets (currently in Magdalena but coming soon to Socorro) offers fresh produce to Socorro. The Farmers Market also accepts SNAP benefits which helps make the produce affordable for all. Roadrunner Food Bank helps provide food for those in need, and Meals On Wheels is a program available in Socorro that helps seniors by delivering food

directly to their houses. Cooking classes are also offered at Finely Gym aimed specifically at people with diabetes.

- New Mexico Tech helps with community events and brings the Performing Arts Series to town. Several participants of the survey noted that they would like to see the school district working closer with NMT and bringing more science into the schools to help promote education and career possibilities.
- There are numerous churches in town that could be brought in for further community involvement.
- Birthright is an organization that provides women with crisis pregnancies care and services.
- Puerto Seguro, Socorro Mental Health, Presbyterian Community Health Center, and the Socorro DWI program all provide substance abuse services.
- Socorro's Presbyterian Hospital and Bhasker Medical Clinic offer primary care.
- Socorro Prevention Coalition is currently forming and will be implementing programs to address underage drinking and prescription drug abuse in January 2015.
- Socorro County Options; Prevention and Education (SCOPE) is a coalition of community members that bring support to community programs and events, included holding the "Maze of Life" at the High School since 2012.
- Socorro Transportation offers shuttle service from Socorro to Magdalena and Alamo, as well as to Belen for RailRunner service. In city service for the shuttle is meant to improve the quality of living for residents by providing transportation for health care appointments, shopping, education, employment, public services and recreation services within the city limit.

## **Conclusion**

In 2012 an assessment by the Socorro County Juvenile Justice Board (5) identified several main issues impacting Socorro County youth:

- Substance Abuse
- Domestic and Community Violence
- Teen Pregnancy
- Abuse and Neglect
- Communication and Coordination (between juvenile justice agencies)
- Youth Vision and Experience: Young people lacking vision of their future or of possibilities for life outside the bounds of their current daily routines.
- Parenting

- Capacity Building

In another health assessment by Presbyterian Socorro General Hospital (2) the main preventable health issues for Socorro County were identified as:

- Access to Care
- Diabetes
- Mental Health

The assessment also identified issues that accompany the high poverty rate in Socorro County. Compared to households with incomes greater than \$30,000 households living in poverty reported their health as “excellent” 50% less. Similarly households in poverty had fewer healthy days, more days with mental health symptoms, and more days of being unable to do work or activities due to health (2).

The findings of these two assessments reflect the results of the work here; the main issues amongst the community in Socorro County remain poverty, substance abuse, obesity, and teen pregnancy. Many participants in this study also voiced concerns that coincided the main issues of the JJB assessment, primarily poor parenting in Socorro County, and the lack of youth vision. Both of these issues relate to the concern of lack of educational attainment in Socorro County, as found in this study to be the area of second most concern. A concern that was expressed by participants in this assessment, but not as often in other assessments is the desire for more family centered activities for the community. Many participants felt there was a need for stronger families and increased parental involvement.

(Article 1)

## THE HEALTH OF SOCORRO COUNTY vs. NEW MEXICO

Socorro County performed statistically & significantly **BETTER** than NM in the following areas:

- **Adolescent/ Daily Physical Activity**, Socorro 37% vs. NM 26%
- **Chlamydia Cases per 100,000 population**, Socorro 433 vs. NM 573

Socorro performed statistically & significantly **WORSE** than NM in:

- **Children Under the Age 18 Living in Poverty**, Socorro 40% vs. NM 29%
- **Educational Attainment Percentage HS Graduate or Higher**, Socorro 79% vs. NM 83%
- **Prenatal Care in the First Trimester**, Socorro 51% vs. NM 64%
- **Alcohol-related Deaths (per 100,000 Population)**, Socorro 76 vs. NM 52
- **Alcohol-related Chronic Disease Deaths (per 100,000 Population)**, Socorro 44 vs. NM 25
- **Diabetes Death Rates (per 100,000 Population)**, Socorro 55 vs. NM 28
- **Youth Cigarette Smoking Prevalence (grades 9-12)**, Socorro 30% vs. NM 20%
- 

Other important health indicators highlighted in **Youth Risk and Resiliency Report**.

### **Binge drinking/ Underage drinking**

- **51%** of HS students reported being drinkers, and **34%** reported binge drinking.
- **35%** of students drank alcohol before age 13, and **15%** reported drinking and driving.

### **Youth Drug Use**

- **27%** of students surveyed said they used marijuana in the past month, **11%** have used painkillers to get high, and **7%** have used inhalants.

(Article 2)

**YOUR INPUT IS NEEDED**

1. Of the health issues where Socorro County performed significantly worse than NM, which issues do you believe are the biggest problems?

(1 is the most important, 2 is second most, 3 is third, and so forth)

- Children Under the Age 18 Living in Poverty** \_\_\_\_\_
- Low High School Graduation Rate** \_\_\_\_\_
- Lack of Prenatal Care in the First Trimester** \_\_\_\_\_
- Alcohol-related Deaths** \_\_\_\_\_
- Alcohol-related Chronic Disease Deaths** \_\_\_\_\_
- Diabetes Deaths** \_\_\_\_\_
- Youth Cigarette Smoking** \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you feel there are other health issues (not listed above) please list them here.

3. What do you believe would most improve the health of our community?

(1 is the most important, 2 is second most, 3 is third, and so forth)

- Activities for Children and Teens** \_\_\_\_\_
- Access to Safe Play Areas for Children** \_\_\_\_\_
- Access to Specialty Care Providers** \_\_\_\_\_
- Access to Primary Care Physician** \_\_\_\_\_
- Nutritional Education** \_\_\_\_\_
- Substance / Alcohol Abuse Services** \_\_\_\_\_
- Education** \_\_\_\_\_

4. If you feel there are other contributing factors to our community health (not listed above) please list them here.

5. What are the assets or resources in our community that we can use to improve our community health?

## Resources

(1) *Socorro County Community Health Profile*. Janet Flores DrPH, MPH. April 26, 2014

(2) *Community Health Needs Assessment: Socorro County, New Mexico 2011-2012*. Presbyterian Socorro General Hospital, March 29, 2012

(3) *Socorro County, Overview & Assessment Findings*. Prepared by Patrica Lincoln, DFL ASSOCIATES. May 21, 2014

(4) *Socorro County Health Snapshot and Health Indicator Data*. Janet Flores DrPH, MPH. January 24, 2014

(5) *Socorro County Juvenile Justice Board, Community Assessment*. DFL Associates, Patricia A. Lincoln & Billie R. Clark, June 30, 2012