RWJF Culture of Health
Community Portrait

Midland, Texas
ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Sentinel Communities Surveillance project, conducted by RTI International in collaboration with the RAND Corporation, is sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The project, which began in 2016, will monitor activities related to how a Culture of Health is developing in each of 30 diverse communities around the country for at least five years. This community portrait follows from the initial Snapshot report for Midland, Texas, and provides insights into drivers of a Culture of Health in the community. The report is not intended to comprehensively describe every action underway in Midland, but rather focuses on key insights, opportunities, and challenges as a community advances on its journey toward health and well-being for all residents.

The information in this report was obtained using several data collection methods, including key informant telephone interviews, an environmental scan of online and published community-specific materials, a review of existing population surveillance and monitoring data, and collection of local data or resources provided by community contacts or interview respondents. Interviews were conducted with individuals representing organizations working in a variety of sectors (for example, health, business, education, faith-based, and environment) in the community. Sector mapping was used to systematically identify respondents in a range of sectors that would have insights about community health and well-being to ensure organizational diversity across the community. We also asked original interviewees to recommend individuals to speak with in an effort to supplement important organizations or perspectives not included in the original sample.

A total of 10 unique respondents were interviewed during spring 2017 for this report. All interviews (lasting 30–75 minutes each) were conducted using semistructured interview guides, tailored to the unique context and activities taking place in each community and to the role of the respondent in the community. Interviewers used probes to ensure that they obtained input on specific items of interest (for example, facilitators and barriers to improved population health, well-being, and equity) and open-ended questions to ensure that they fully addressed and captured participants’ responses and perceptions about influences on health and well-being in their communities. Individuals who participated in a key informant interview are not identified by name or organization to protect confidentiality, but they are identified as a “respondent.”

Information collected through environmental scans includes program and organizational information available on internet websites, publicly available documents, and media reports. Population surveillance and monitoring data were compiled from publicly available data sets, including the American Community Survey; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; and other similar federal, state, and local data sources.

We will conduct ongoing surveillance and monitoring activities in these communities through 2020 and report updated information on their progress, challenges, and lessons learned in improving health and well-being for all residents.

Data collection and monitoring thus far has revealed common themes among otherwise distinct communities. The next phase of this project will be cross-community reports. These will examine common themes across subgroups of the 30 communities (for example, rural communities, communities experiencing large demographic shifts, and communities leveraging local data for decision-making). These reports will also be posted on cultureofhealth.org.
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Introduction

In our Snapshot report, we described Midland, Texas, as a pro-business, generally prosperous city that has both grown and declined with the changing fortunes of the oil and gas industries. Currently recovering from a global surplus in petroleum products that occurred earlier in the decade, Midland also is experiencing a surge of new residents, including migrant workers, who have arrived to reap the benefits of well-paying jobs. The population influx leads to overcrowding in the city’s public schools, health clinics, and housing—problems that disproportionately affect new and lower-income residents. Evidence of new thinking and collaborative efforts to promote health and well-being for all residents is beginning to emerge in various sectors, but Midland on the whole remains a city typical of greater Texas, in which business interests are paramount, lack of health insurance is prevalent, and public health assistance is relatively scant. These conditions likely contribute to disease rates among Midland residents that are higher than state averages. Although there are few cross-sector efforts to combat community health problems, concerted efforts are underway to improve schools, preschool care, and job training—each having impact on the community’s overall health and well-being.

In this report, we examine Midland’s efforts to improve population health and build a healthier and more equitable community using the Culture of Health Action Framework to interpret and organize key findings. The Framework prioritizes four broad areas: 1) Making Health a Shared Value; 2) Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve
Well-Being; 3) Creating Healthier, More Equitable Communities; and 4) Strengthening Integration of Health Services and Systems, within which activities and investments can advance population health, well-being, and equity in diverse community contexts. Using the Framework, we describe how Midland’s stakeholders and residents are working toward a new concept of civic engagement that promotes community health and well-being, and seeks to support residents of all backgrounds and economic status.

**OIL, GAS INDUSTRY TIED TO MIDLAND’S ECONOMIC WELFARE**

Known as the Tall City for its skyscrapers visible from 30 miles away, Midland sits on the edge of West Texas’ Permian Basin, a large, flat plain where oil pumps line the horizon. Oil and natural gas exploration is the city’s major economic driver, and the industry’s fortunes directly impact Midland’s. In 2015, the city lost 7 percent of all jobs as oil prices fell globally. The Permian Basin holds one of the world’s thickest deposits of rocks from the Permian geologic period, making it among the richest oil-producing areas in the world.

Midland’s reliance on oil drilling and production began in the 1920s. Since then, the economic variation in the oil sector and the city’s fortunes have been inextricably linked. When oil prices rise, Midland’s economy responds with new jobs, demand for housing, and an influx of new residents. But oil booms also result in housing shortages and higher costs of living, which disproportionately impact migrant and low-income workers. When oil prices fall, jobs vanish, incomes fall, and office buildings vacated as companies—and recently arrived residents—depart.

Midland lost about 11,000 jobs (nearly half of them in the oil industry) between 2014 and 2016 during the height of a global oil glut. In late 2016, the U.S. Geological Survey announced the discovery of the largest U.S. deposit of oil and natural gas in a formation adjacent to Midland known as the Wolfcamp shale, with a large portion of it in the Midland section of the Permian Basin. Predictably, this has sparked an aggressive recovery: unemployment has dropped by 24 percent between 2016 and 2017 to just 3.4 percent, and single-family housing construction permits have jumped by 45 percent over the 12-month period ending May 2017.

Interview respondents, many of whom are life-long Midland residents, describe a city of notable wealth and poverty, with little in between. Midland’s 130,000 population is divided into a segment of older, financially well-off residents with deep ties to the city and a segment of lower-income, newer, and more transient workers, whose residency depends exclusively on their current employment. Midland’s population is racially and ethnically diverse (46% white; 44% Hispanic; 7% black), and its median household income ($68,806) is higher than the state’s ($53,207). Although middle class and affluent families from all demographics can be found in the city, the vast majority of the neediest census track in Midland is, according to several interview respondents, Hispanic.

Texas’ culture of individualism and self-reliance is evident throughout Midland, and the prevailing political mindset remains that help is to be asked for and not just given by government agencies. There are signs, however, that Midland’s leadership is beginning to implement approaches to the built environment that focus on improving the health and well-being of residents. For example, the City of Midland recently developed a long-term comprehensive plan, Tall City Tomorrow, to map urban planning and development in Midland and to focus on quality-of-life improvements for all residents. The plan cites better, more affordable housing, improved transportation, more green space, and better parks as important assets that can attract and retain young families. However, large-scale efforts to improve Midland’s health and quality of life face significant financial and social constraints. The city’s volatile economy and Texas’ lack of a state income tax severely restrict available funds for public outreach. Voluntary, private sector support remains the preferred vehicle for addressing social needs. Persistent problems—declining quality of public education, an aging built environment, and highly fragmented access to health care—require outsized contributions from civic, business, and philanthropic groups, which only recently have begun to collaborate on health and well-being initiatives. Local foundations, seeded by family fortunes earned in oil, gas and cattle ranching, have historically given more support to education, capital improvements, and the arts, but are beginning to turn their attention more often to community health issues.

Education and student performance has become a pressing concern in Midland in recent years. A high-performing system just 15 years ago, the Midland Independent School District (ISD) is now overwhelmed by thousands of new students who have enrolled during the most recent oil boom. Classrooms are over capacity, and the city’s high-priced rental housing market makes recruiting new teachers difficult. Deteriorating infrastructure and staffing challenges negatively impact students’ performance compared to state averages, although Midland spends more per student than most of its peer districts. Scores on standardized testing have improved, but in 2016 most Midland schools still scored 10 or more points below state benchmarks in math and reading. Midland ISD largely serves the community’s lower-income and migrant residents; 62 percent of the district’s students are Hispanic, while 27 percent are white and 8 percent are black. Many higher-income families choose to send their children to private or charter schools. Most of these students are white, but wealthier residents of all races are somewhat insulated from the school system realities facing poorer Midlanders.

After years of concentrating on economic development and making the city more attractive to potential employees and residents (such as expanding green spaces and parks), city leadership has begun to address the severity of the school district’s problems. Changes in school leadership has facilitated reform, and new school administrators have demonstrated willingness to work with community reformers to implement systemic change to Midland’s education network.

Health care access and overall wellness are also chronic issues in Midland. Nearly one in five residents lack health insurance and, by extension, access to timely primary and preventive care. Midland suffers from a shortage of primary care providers; the ratio of patients to primary care providers in Midland County is 2,690 to 1 compared to 1,670 to 1 in the state overall. Chronic conditions, including obesity, diabetes, and sexually transmitted diseases, are prevalent.
Midland is a rich community that stands in stark contrast to most neighboring counties and towns. It routinely gives up millions of dollars to the state under the so-called "Robin Hood rule" that redistributes taxes from the state's wealthiest communities to those less affluent. Through foundations, the business community provides abundant funding for a variety of community projects and health-focused initiatives. However, these efforts could be better coordinated and take a more systemic approach if handled by a public entity, such as the health department. There is evidence that the city's leadership recognizes the link between holistic communities and a strong business climate, most notably a focus on improving educational opportunities in Midland. Meanwhile, organizations across a variety of sectors are attempting to address influences on health in early childhood development, workforce preparation, and the built environment. Although Midland does not have a long history of cross-sector collaborations and formal partnerships, promising recent attempts to approach community issues using a collective impact model. This could result in more collaborative efforts to address factors influencing health and well-being.

Partnerships between educational providers and business and community groups have increased Midland's capacity to work with residents and their children at all stages of development. Midland's political and business leadership have recognized that educational opportunities must improve for the city to be attractive to new residents, with greater focus on more support for public schools. Although the link between educational opportunity and community health is not always explicit, through recent efforts the city has expanded its capacity to influence this important determinant of health.

Particular attention is being given to early childhood and job training for students. There is more awareness that Midland children at all development stages—particularly those in vulnerable populations—can thrive with more institutional support to their social, family, and educational environments. In recent years, more data has been compiled on regional populations. For example, First 5, a federally funded community partnership implemented by University of Texas–Permian Basin, collects and monitors neighborhood-level data to assess students' readiness for school with measures that include physical health and well-being; child insurance coverage; social competence; and teen pregnancy. The city's focus on economic development has helped create productive partnerships between educational institutions and industries eager to train and recruit new workers. Midland College and the University of Texas–Permian Basin are attempting to prepare local students for occupations with high earning potential. Midland College, a two-year community college, offers associate's degrees and certification programs in nursing; aviation maintenance technology; and oil and gas technology to more than 7,000 students.

Over the course of nearly two years, stakeholders from prominent foundations; community-based organizations; oil companies; the public school system; and 40 community leaders from diverse neighborhoods have coalesced behind Educate Midland. This nonprofit organization focuses on transforming the educational standards and academic performance of students in Midland's public schools. Businesses and philanthropies have pledged more than $24 million to support Educate Midland through 2019. This is laying the foundation for residents to create and implement community-driven and responsive approaches to improving public education.

Midland’s capacity to pursue initiatives focused on equity and racial and ethnic disparities has expanded through local organizations that have tapped into the resources of state-level services and regional advocacy groups. These efforts helped bring integrative services to vulnerable Midland residents and increase awareness of the need to reach across divides and provide culturally competent support, including multilingual staff. A notable example is the Midland County System of Care (MCSOC), a recent collaborative effort spearheaded by Midland’s Juvenile Probation Department to address health and social needs of at-risk youth and families. Begun in 2016, MCSOC works across local agencies to improve access to culturally competent services and support for children and families. The Texas System of Care, a statewide youth mental health advocacy group, founded the initiative, which promotes collaboration among systems that serve high-risk children, youth, and families. It weaves mental health supports and services—child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and mental health—into a seamless system of care.

Grassroots organizations also are working to raise awareness of equity issues and promote better understanding between Midland’s disparate populations. For example, Midland Citizens United to Reach Equity (CURE) hosts forums, “talk back” dinners, and poverty simulations for workers who engage low-income populations. The simulations aim to help workers understand both the conditions of impoverished families and the challenges they face when confronting government bureaucracy. CURE has also partnered with state-level organizations, including the State of Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Center for Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities. Capacity is hampered in social services by the growing need for multilingual staff, particularly those who interface mostly with low-income and transient residents.

Midland Memorial Hospital, the community’s flagship nonprofit provider, is a 474-bed hospital with specialization in cardiovascular and joint replacement care and women’s and children’s services. It also provides health screening activities, fitness classes, and partners with the Midland County Health Department to provide immunizations for children. The hospital’s 2017 community health improvement plan prioritized the need to provide residents with more education and services to address high mortality rates, chronic diseases, preventable conditions, and unhealthy lifestyles.

Midland’s three Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) accept uninsured and Medicaid-insured patients, and given the city’s high uninsured rate, each facility experiences high patient volumes. Midland’s Planned Parenthood facility and several smaller rural reproductive health clinics contracted by Planned Parenthood closed their doors in 2016 after Texas defunded health organizations that also provide abortions.
Midland’s community health needs assessment and community health improvement plan are collaborative efforts. Midland Memorial Hospital plays the central role in implementing these measures, with the United Way of Midland serving as a key partner in this effort. The foundation also convenes a Health and Wellness Committee that brings together partners from different Midland agencies.

Facing Disparity Issues of Large Transient Worker Population

Midland has traditionally been a business-focused, siloed community with few examples of cross-sector approaches to health issues. But there are important attempts underway to forge a more holistic view of health, with a particular focus on early life interventions. Notably, Midland Memorial Hospital has undergone what an education sector respondent described as “a complete makeover in their philosophy in providing health care, and they are expanding the values philosophy they are using and sharing with the educational community.” Midland’s business and philanthropic communities are beginning to work together to improve education; address early childhood development; and focus on root causes of juvenile justice concerns like poor educational outcomes, which disproportionately affect minority populations. Midland’s evolution from an insular, top-down leadership structure to one that invites wider participation by other community members will take time, according to several respondents, but attitudes may be shifting. After a presentation to the city council, one respondent from the education sector noted the council “understood that a city government does have to think about its youngest citizens. It can’t just focus on business.”

The philanthropic community meets on an ongoing basis through a funder’s roundtable to determine funding priorities and to learn about and share effective strategies for improving quality of life in Midland. However, political conditions give Midland’s business class outsized influence over the communities’ priorities. The state is one of only 12 in the country that places no restrictions on contributions to political campaigns, lobbyists, and third parties that seek to influence elections—which helps sustain the influence of Midland’s business class.

ADDRessing PoOR EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE

In 2002, Midland ISD had the second best rating in the state with three campuses earning the top rating by the Texas Education Agency. By 2009, only four of its 16 campuses were rated as “academically acceptable.” The specific causes of the decline are unclear; anecdotal explanations, such as difficulty attracting teachers or a high number of non-English speaking students, are not supported by data. Nevertheless, “[W]e were performing much lower than what we should be, given the resources of the area,” said one respondent from the education sector.

It was not until business and community leaders became convinced that the schools’ poor performance served as a barrier to families and businesses considering a move to the area that momentum for change began in earnest. “The disparities we’ve been seeing in the education between economically disadvantaged and race and ethnicity have always been there,” said one respondent. “It’s just now becoming a topic because it’s impacting everybody, including the business sector.”

Educate Midland has adapted a collective action approach in which the organization creates a shared community vision; measures key milestones; uses data-driven findings to refine strategies; aligns stakeholders and resources; and identifies a supporting organization to unite community resources. The organization is also building a culture of ownership model, which is designed to engage teachers and other ISD personnel in the creation of a new educational philosophy. Aided by the Warren Charitable Foundation, Educate Midland partners are encouraging education staff at all levels to adopt a sense of personal accountability and critical thinking. The goals include increased quality of education, improved student achievement, and staff retention.

Outcomes from these efforts are pending, but Educate Midland plans to use selected indicators to measure student success, which are a part of early-, middle-, or late-phase education, such as kindergarten readiness, middle school math, and postsecondary degree completion. The Educate Midland leadership will determine the measurement guidelines along the “cradle-to-career continuum” in collaboration with the Data Support Council. Educate Midland plans to develop an annual community scorecard that will help it track success over time.

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—BUSINESS SECTOR RESPONDENT

Midland’s business community is also making efforts to connect with students and prepare them for careers in local industries. The Chamber of Commerce is working to promote mentoring programs; address classroom needs; and support teachers through awards and participation in Midland ISD’s Partners in Education program. The program connects students to the city’s business community through apprenticeships, tutoring, and other activities, and also provides resources for scholarships.

Because education is the focal point of Midland’s recent drive to improve overall community health, programs that focus on early childhood development are of particular importance. Stakeholders recognized that data indicated that preschoolers were not receiving sufficient support to become school ready from their social and physical environments, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods. Growing awareness of these drivers of school success—improved health, and ultimate well-being—led to the expansion of First 5 Permian Basin,
which originally concentrated its efforts in Odessa, a working-class community about 20 miles west of Midland. The federally funded organization expanded to Midland in 2013 when poor education and health statistics shed light on the ongoing needs of many Midland communities. Notably, in some Midland neighborhoods fewer than half of 3- and 4-year-olds are enrolled in pre-K programs.\(^{27}\) The Abell-Hanger Foundation, a major Educate Midland funder, also underwrote First 5’s expansion in Midland, which has fostered a collaborative relationship between the two organizations.

First 5 has been instrumental in establishing an Educate Midland Early Childhood Action Network, which is meant to advance school readiness and early literacy goals in collaboration with community partners and other organizations from the philanthropic, health, and education sectors.\(^{22}\) One respondent noted that First 5’s data has helped Educate Midland sharpen its focus on early childhood issues. “We’ve come to a place where we are starting to find a common agenda,” said one respondent from the education sector.

“One in order for a child to be ready for kindergarten, he or she needs to be healthy, coming from a stable environment, and having parents who are engaged.”

— Education Sector Respondent

Although First 5 focuses on kindergarten preparedness, one respondent noted that, “In order for a child to be ready for kindergarten, he or she needs to be healthy, coming from a stable environment, and having parents who are engaged.” To promote a more holistic approach, the organization staffs an early childhood coalition with participants from education, health care, and social services. The coalition uses a community-impact model and assembles data to illustrate the overlap between health, education, and income. It convenes monthly meetings with partner organizations to present their data and discuss how it may be used to influence policymakers. Although childhood needs remain central to the coalition’s focus, it is also tracking population measures like health insurance coverage and economic stability.

The data compiled by First 5 fuel evidence-based approaches that tailor policies and systems to better meet the needs of students and young families. For instance, First 5 uses a home-visiting program in which registered nurses work with low-income families and first-time expectant mothers to ensure that the mother receives the care she needs and the child is born healthy. Teachers also conduct home visits and work one on one with vulnerable preschool children. In addition, First 5 offers a program to strengthen the ability of children who are about to start kindergarten to engage in their classes and education.\(^{27}\) It has recently started supporting teen fathers to help them become better parents and role models for their children.

Moreover, First 5 uses data to highlight education inequities across the community. It has leveraged similar data in Odessa to advocate for policy changes that support stable and safe environments for vulnerable preschool children and plans to do the same in Midland.

**Leveraging Government, Business Planning to Improve Quality of Life**

Midland is working to enhance the community’s quality of life and reduce disparities through direct government investment and government-affiliated efforts. The most visible effort is the city’s Tall City Tomorrow, a long-term, strategic planning effort. Tall City Tomorrow is primarily a vehicle to promote economic development and attract more skilled professionals to the region. Higher quality-of-life indices can make Midland more attractive to newcomers, but the strategic plan also acknowledges current residents’ needs and desires for more opportunities for physical activity and promotion of healthy habits. Plans include the addition of much-needed green space, parks, and recreational amenities like walking and biking trails. Input on the plan from community members was sought over a two-year period, and it revealed a strong desire to build a greater sense of community, diversify the economy, beautify Midland and its downtown, connect civic and recreational amenities with trails and sidewalks, and improve opportunities for youth.

Although the business development and long-term planning concerns that produced Tall City Tomorrow may have the benefit of improving the quality of life of all Midland residents, that is a secondary, not primary, consideration. For example, the city-sponsored plan does not address equity concerns in improving the built environment or creating options for physical activity access for residents of underserved neighborhoods. It also remains unclear whether new or upgraded park facilities will be distributed equitably across the city. The city proposed a tax increase to fund new parks and park improvements, but the measure failed to win support in May 2017.\(^{24}\) Because decision-making power in Midland remains concentrated in the oil and gas business sector, it is uncertain whether another proposal focused on community-level improvements can pass in the current political climate.

**Collaborations Support Juvenile Justice, Equity Concerns**

Several relatively new efforts are focused on outreach to underserved populations and addressing chronic environmental problems that disproportionately affect them. MCSOC is the county’s collaborative effort to provide culturally competent services for at-risk families and youth. It engages local partners to address health and social concerns that are prevalent among low-income and minority youth. MCSOC was launched in 2016 and is being led by the Midland Juvenile Probation Department with the goal of preventing youth from entering juvenile detention, or, should this occur, keeping them within the county system.

At-risk students are referred to MCSOC by their schools; most are referred to juvenile probation because of marijuana possession at school. Family trauma—evidenced by incarceration of a family member, sexual abuse, or violence in the home or community—is highly prevalent among these students.\(^{28}\) The organization relies on evidence-based approaches and wraparound services to address issues that may include substance abuse; truancy; unsafe home environments; and mental health issues. Partners in this collaborative effort include social workers; juvenile probation officers; teachers; parents; mental health providers; and church leaders.
CURE—the grassroots effort to promote equitable access to health and human services—is a by-product of the state legislature’s creation of the Texas Center for the Elimination of Disproportionality and Disparities (TCEDD) in 2011. The group’s initial focus was on racial disparities in the children’s welfare system. It has since expanded its scope to include other health and human services issues. CURE partners with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Office of Minority Health Statistics and Engagement (formerly the TCEDD, renamed in July 2017)—which was mandated by the Texas Legislature in 2011 in response to prevailing racial disparities in the state’s juvenile justice system. CURE is not a legally incorporated entity, but its leaders are striving to maintain an organized structure and alignment with similar community organizations in other cities in Texas. “Midland CURE is still a grassroots community group, but we try to meet on a monthly basis to provide advocacy, education, and awareness, and to make sure community voices are heard not just among our local organizations but at the capitol,” one respondent from the nonprofit sector reported. “If there are struggles here that we also see in Houston or Dallas, we can have a stronger pool of voices to address those issues.”

CURE also works closely with one of the state’s 11 regional equity specialists—who are employed by Texas’ Health and Human Services agency. The specialists address racial disproportionality and disparities by examining data and discussing advocacy, education, and awareness of issues affecting underrepresented communities in Midland. CURE seeks to raise awareness among service providers through efforts like poverty simulations. These replicate not just day-to-day tasks of impoverished families but also their efforts to navigate through government services. Although several respondents said the organization is addressing important and underappreciated issues, one nonprofit sector respondent questioned the group’s ability to promote real change in the community. “It’s been difficult to get this many sectors together, especially when you are talking about race and ethnicity.”

Educate Midland also has attempted to include community voices in its decision-making. It has worked to bring more racial, ethnic, and professional diversity to its advisory board, front-line staff, and teaching talent. It also is working to reflect the perspectives of service providers who work in underrepresented communities.

Summary of Midland’s Efforts to Build a Culture of Health

Using the Culture of Health Action Framework to guide Sentinel community data collection and monitoring in Midland, it appears that the community is beginning to engage a greater variety of partners to address and improve key areas that influence health and well-being. However, Midland appears to define health and well-being almost exclusively in the context of a better-educated population, with funding and broad community activity supporting this approach. To this end, Midland’s business, philanthropic, education, and other community sectors have shown strong support for Fostering Cross-Sector Collaboration to Improve Well-Being through the Educate Midland initiative. With multimillion-dollar investments in the initiative from Midland’s oil companies and foundations, this cross-sector collaboration is well positioned to eventually provide students with greater opportunities for success. To date, few outward signs of progress are evident in the area of Creating Healthier, More Equitable Communities, although efforts to prevent and address juvenile justice and racial equity issues are at early stages. But Midland appears to retain its preference for individual and voluntary solutions to health care access, as evidence of Strengthening and Integration of Health Systems and Services efforts remains weak.

Midland has shown promising signs of development as a community where a Culture of Health could flourish, but it remains focused on the community’s business climate and attracting new employers and residents, with less consideration for the health outcomes of all current residents. The governing philosophy emphasizes improvement in Midland as a means to attract the upper- and middle-class workers needed by the city’s gas and oil industries. However, better schools, parkland, and living environments carry residual benefits for all Midlanders. The culture where health is prioritized for all may advance even though it is not an expressed objective of the city’s power structure. Whether this mindset will change with the unfolding collective action vision and philosophy that underpins some new efforts, such as Educate Midland, remains to be seen.

“Midland as a whole is the easiest and most giving community I’ve ever lived in.”

NONPROFIT SECTOR RESPONDENT

Tangible evidence of Midland’s efforts to improve health and well-being remains limited. But the city’s recent work in education, cross-sector collaboration, and understanding disparities and built environment, through Educate Midland, First 5, Midland CURE, and Tall City Tomorrow, are building blocks of capacity that could eventually address drivers of health. These efforts could lay the groundwork for more coordinated efforts to promote healthier populations in the future. However, Midland currently remains slow to address systemic issues and policies that affect the health of disadvantaged and lower-income residents.

Midland’s efforts to create a Culture of Health are at an early stage, with the connections between the socioeconomic factors that determine health and the community’s long-term well-being just coming into view. In the near term, the progress of the multisector collaboration (Educate Midland) in creating a better-performing public school system could reframe how individual sectors work together toward community-wide concerns. Because this initiative has attracted the participation—and considerable financial support—of Midland’s “old guard” of established business leaders, it may be misleading to compare its progress to those of other emerging but less coordinated and financially supported
Support and engagement from foundation and business sectors. Midland enjoys strong support from local foundations and businesses for many of its efforts to improve health and well-being. The most prominent example of its engagement is Educate Midland, which is expected to receive more than $24 million from these sectors through 2019. Foundations, individuals, and businesses, many of which derive their wealth from the oil and gas industry, also support a number of other outreach activities that benefit the community, including those sponsored by the United Way, Midland Hospital, and other groups. “Midland as a whole is the easiest and most giving community I’ve ever lived in,” said one respondent from the nonprofit sector.

Proximity, partnerships with local educational institutions. For a relatively small city, Midland reaps big gains from its proximity to a regional branch of the University of Texas and a large community college. The University of Texas–Permian Basin hosts the early childhood development program, First 5, which serves families in Midland and Ector Counties. It offers degree programs in fast-growing, high-demand areas, including petroleum and mechanical engineering, information systems, and nursing. Midland College, a two-year community college, provides associate’s degrees and certificates in these high-demand fields. Midland College also partners with the Midland Development Corporation to assist in the development of the college’s wind energy training program, and has a state-of-the-art educational facility for the individuals preparing for careers in the oil and gas industry.

Data to inform programmatic and workforce needs. Although at early stages, a number of Midland organizations are using data to better understand programmatic needs and anticipate the needs of the emerging workforce. For example, the First 5 Early Childhood Coalition is collecting data on 12 population health measures that will be used to monitor programmatic impact in the future. Midland CURE is developing data-driven strategies that use race equity principles to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations. And the Abell-Hangar Foundation is examining job demand data to determine the value of expanding the STEM Academy at the University of Texas–Permian Basin to more than 600 students in Midland’s public schools.

Efforts to improve health and well-being. Nonetheless, the progress that results from Educate Midland could serve as an important benchmark for the future success of all residents, and one that will merit close attention in the future.

Additional trends to monitor include efforts by the city’s health department, Midland Memorial Hospital, FQHCs, and other community organizations to address rates of chronic disease and promote prevention programs. Midland Memorial Hospital issued an implementation plan in January 2017 that prioritizes these needs, along with health disparities among underserved populations, and the need for increases in health care services overall. The consequences of a Planned Parenthood clinic closure in 2016 also will merit observation, as will efforts to compensate for the loss of an important health care provider.

Midland’s tradition of self-reliance, formed as part of its proud Texan history, is likely to remain both an asset and a liability to the long-term success of the community’s efforts to advance toward a Culture of Health. This deeply ingrained sensibility has contributed to the residents’ economic prosperity, which in turn creates job opportunities and financial support for services to assist low-income residents and immigrants. On the other hand, the city’s individualistic bent can serve as a brake on meaningful supporting programs. How Midland navigates the territory created by these opposing forces will play a critical role in the evolution of the community’s health and well-being.
References


