

Global Health Elective Report: Designing a Community Needs Assessment for a Local Cincinnati Neighborhood

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Background: As a 4th year medical student in April 2013, I had the opportunity to serve as the clinical coordinator and assistant director of a community health fair put on by my church, Christ the King church. Christ the King was planted in 2010 with the aim of seeing people reconciled to God through each other and Jesus Christ, serving the city of Cincinnati with God's Love. One of the ways in which the church desires to serve the community is by meeting community members' health needs. Out of this desire, a team was put together, under the leadership of the church's lead pastor, to conduct the community health fair. Some of the services offered included blood pressure screening, diabetes screening, nutrition counseling, physical therapy, visit with a physician, free medications, a food pantry and prayer. The team prepared for a projected 200 attendees; however, the final count was just over 40, and many did not use some of the services provided, specifically the food pantry and medications. In de-briefing, the team decided that the desire to serve the community in this way still remained but that in order to serve well we would need to better understand our community and their needs. Thus it was decided that before moving forward with any additional health fairs, a community needs assessment would need to be conducted.

Objectives:

1. Define a needs assessment.
2. Describe the elements of a needs assessment.
3. Give examples of community-driven interventions or projects that are sustainable and empower communities.
4. Define the target community that Christ the King church desires to help.
5. Gather any existing information about the needs of target community.
6. Identify potential health disparities and gaps in the target community.
7. Design a needs assessment questionnaire or survey.
8. Identify 1 key stakeholder in the target community to conduct future in-depth interviews about the needs of the community.

Discussion: A needs assessment is a way of asking a group or community what they see as the most important needs of that group or community (2). A need is what stands between the current state and the desired outcome (1). The results of a needs assessment can be used to help prioritize and guide future action. Additionally, the process of conducting the assessment can boost community support for actions and increase community involvement in the actions themselves (2).

There are several elements necessary to conduct a needs assessment. The Office of Migrant Education defines a three-phase model in conducting a needs assessment: explore "what is", gather and analyze data and make decisions (1). The first phase, exploration, involves defining the target area and investigating what is already known about the group. It is also important in this phase to define the scope of the needs

assessment as well as secure commitment for all phases to ensure that the assessment is carried through to completion. The second phase is the data collection phase. The CDC suggests using at least 2 methods to gather data to ensure quality (3); this may include focus groups, surveys and/or key stakeholder interviews. If a survey will be used, it is a good idea to pilot the questions with a small group and obtain feedback. Finally, the assessment is not complete without an action plan to act on the gathered data. The goal here is to define improvement areas to guide the community toward healthier living and assist with prioritizing community needs (3).

One method that can be used to conduct a needs assessment that is both community-driven and sustainable is an assets-oriented needs assessment (4). This is a way for community members to identify and support existing resources in the community while encouraging creativity and buy-in when addressing problems. This could involve questions such as “What are some of the community’s strengths?” or “What are some of the gifts and talents of the people here?” or a simple listing of physical resources within a community. One author conducted an assets-oriented assessment by putting cameras into the hands of rural women in China to capture the strengths of a community.

Conclusion: The target population for my needs assessment includes the neighborhoods of Clifton, Uptown and Fairview (CUF) in Cincinnati. Prior needs assessment of this and surrounding communities indicate that top potential needs are increased health education, mental health services and preventative care (5). Specific individual health concerns include heart disease, physical inactivity, obesity, tobacco use, obesity and diabetes care (5, 6). The primary means of data collection is via a written survey that is to be administered verbally by interview. The survey asks about demographic information, educational level, housing, neighborhood safety, employment, food sources, transportation, access to healthcare and religious preference. The next steps will be to pilot the survey with a small focus group and revise as necessary, form a team of Christ the King church members to administer the survey and interview 1-2 key stakeholders from the community to provide an additional source of data. Finally, the data will be analyzed and an action plan formed to help move the community toward any identified needs.

Resources:

1. Office of Migrant Education. (2001). Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/compneedsassessment.pdf>
2. University of Kansas. (2014). Community Tool Box. Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys. Chapter 3, Section 7. Retrieved from <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conducting-needs-assessment-surveys/main>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). Community Health Assessment and Group Evaluation (CHANGE) Action Guide: Building a Foundation of Knowledge to Prioritize Community Needs. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/change/pdf/changeactionguide.pdf>
4. Sharpe P.A., Greaney M. L., Lee, P.R., Royce, S. W. (2000). Assets-Oriented Community Assessment. *Public Health Reports*, 115, 205-211.

5. University of Cincinnati Medical Center. (2013). Community Health Needs Assessment. Retrieved from <http://uchealth.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/UCMC-Assessment-FINAL.pdf>
6. Hamilton County Community Health Assessment Report, 2005-2006. Cincinnati: Hamilton County Public Health. December 2007.