

Conducting Community Health Needs Assessments: A Ten-Step Process



An assessment process centered around convening a broad-based Community Group that reviews data and information to identify health needs of the community, provides qualitative input, and makes recommendations to the community.

Prepared by

The North Dakota Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility (Flex) Program

Center for Rural Health
The University of North Dakota
School of Medicine and Health Sciences
1301 N Columbia Road, Stop 9037
Grand Forks, ND 58202-9037



A community health needs assessment is a systematic process that involves the community to identify and analyze community health needs and assets. The process also involves prioritizing needs and laying the groundwork for action to address unmet community health needs. In addition to satisfying regulatory requirements of the Affordable Care Act and accreditation standards, needs assessments:

- (1) provide access to timely input from the local community;
- (2) summarize secondary data related to health conditions and indicators;
- (3) assemble information to guide decision making, marketing efforts, and the development of an implementation plan; and
- (4) encourage community engagement and local involvement that informs the future of health care delivery.

Based on a model developed by the National Center for Rural Health Works, the Center for Rural Health at the University of North Dakota adopted a nine-step process for conducting community health needs assessments. At the heart of the process is convening a broad-based Community Group that meets at least twice, reviews data and information to identify health needs of the community, and prioritizes the identified needs.

The Ten Steps of the Assessment Process

Step 1: Initial Communication

Communication is the foundation for the community health needs assessment (CHNA) and its success is contingent upon open and transparent communication and developing a strong communication channel with organizational leadership. Research oversight will be provided by the University of North Dakota's Institutional Review Board.

Step 2: Develop a Steering Committee

Forming a Steering Committee is a strategy to help gain support in carrying out all of the tasks associated with a CHNA and make the process collaborative in nature. The Steering Committee provides continuity and local guidance to the CHNA process so it reflects your community. The Steering Committee should consist of 1-2 other individuals who can assist in providing oversight to the CHNA process and completing the required tasks. The Steering Committee must include a public health staff and hospital employee or board member, as well as other volunteers who will spearhead the CHNA process.

Step 3: Survey Development

The CHNA survey tool contains both open-ended and close-ended questions, and is a good way to gather honest, anonymous feedback. The survey will be available to all community members at locations throughout the county. It includes a set of base questions and the Steering Committee will have the opportunity to select additional community questions from a list of sample options.

Step 4: Plan Community Meeting One

Working with the Steering Committee, review the community's calendar, and venue availability to select three potential dates for an on-site Community Meeting. Invite community members to participate in either of two forms of facilitated discussions:

- 1) Key informant interviews, which are 45 minutes, one-on-one meetings with people who are actively involved in the community.
- 2) A community meeting, which is an hour-and-a-half discussion with 10 to 15 community stakeholders.

Step 5: Launch Media Campaign and Distribute Survey

In this process, surveys are intended to be an additional tool for collecting qualitative information about community perceptions, not a method of collecting statistically valid data. The survey is available in an online format and in print. Distribute the surveys as widely as possible to area residents, taking care to make them available to different demographic groups, including lower income residents, medically underserved residents, minority residents, and residents with chronic health conditions. To spread the word about the CHNA, and get the best reach and breath of your coverage, tailor your media campaign to the local communication channels.

To prepare for distributing the survey, brainstorm businesses and local gatherings at which the survey will be made available. Hard-copy surveys should be returned via mail to help ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes will be provided to encourage community responses.

Step 6: Hold the First Community Meeting

On the agenda for Community Meeting One:

- 1) Overview of the process
- 2) Share the hospital's services, community benefits, and demographic data
- 3) Conduct a focus group session exploring the topics of the survey in greater detail
- 4) Explain the process for survey distribution to community members
- 5) Completion and distribution of surveys

Step 7: Finalize Survey Distribution and Plan Community Meeting Two

As the survey window comes to a close, monitor survey completion rates and ensure surveys have been collected from distribution sites throughout the community.

Working with the Steering Committee, review the community's calendar, and venue availability to select three potential dates for Community Meeting Two. Meeting participants will review survey results, findings from Community Meeting One and any key informant interviews, along with secondary data about health conditions and indicators.

Step 8: Hold Community Meeting Two

On the agenda for Community Meeting Two:

- 1) Presentation of secondary data about health conditions and indicators
- 2) Presentation of results of community survey
- 3) Presentation of findings of key informant interviews and Community Meeting One
- 4) Presentation of a list of community health needs
- 5) Prioritize the identified health needs

Step 9: Closing the CHNA Process

Based on the decisions and recommendations stemming from Community Meeting Two, a Community Health Needs Assessment report will be written. The draft will be sent to the liaison for review, then the CRH will send a finalized report to the liaison. The report will then need to be approved by the hospital's board of directors.

Distribute the CHNA report widely to the community. Ensure that the report is prominently displayed on the organization's website and at the front desk. Thank the community for their effort, participation and community engagement.

Step 10: Implementation Plan and Outcomes

Following the receipt of your final report, you will create an implementation plan. The implementation plan must be completed and approved by your board within five months and fifteen days following your taxable year. This will be reported in part V of your 990.