

Community Needs Assessments

Community needs assessments are defined as a way of gauging opinions, assumptions, needs, key issues, and/or assets within a defined community.

Types of community health needs assessments:

- A comprehensive community needs assessment provides general and detailed information on the health status of the population, health conditions that disproportionately affect the population, available resources, and unmet needs. They are used to establish priorities for overall health planning and resource development.
- A targeted community needs assessment focuses on a specific priority issue (e.g., childhood obesity). It is structured to collect both data and community input on the prevalence, perspectives, factors associated with the condition, barriers, and assets/resources for addressing the issue.

Reasons for conducting a community needs assessment include:

- Identifying community needs, concerns and issues
- Providing background information and data to develop new projects and interventions to address priority health topics
- Targeting outreach programs
- Empowering grassroots action around needs
- Determine if needs have changed
- Prioritizing needs

Community assessment tools include:

Tool	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
Public Issues Forum	Public meetings that involve residents to express their concerns about community issues, problems, and needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse members can share ideas • Provides a quick look at community issues • Involves local citizens • Inexpensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires skill/time • Opinions only obtained from those who attend • May generate more questions or conflict
Observations	Describe an observed setting including activities, items, and people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an opportunity to learn things that people may be unwilling to talk about • Obtain firsthand experience with a setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires skill/time • People may not act naturally

Interviews	A conversation with a purpose, designed to help gather information about people's perspectives/assumptions and gather opinions/ideas from selected community members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to conduct • Provides detailed information • Allows for clarification/follow up on questions • Personal contact builds rapport • Allows an interviewer to learn things they cannot observe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time-consuming • Requires skill/time • Person being interviewed may provide answers he/she thinks the interviewer wants to hear • Information is hard to summarize
Focus Groups	A way to gather in-depth opinions/ideas from a small, targeted group of community members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to conduct • Provides detailed information • Allows for issue probing • Stimulates thinking and discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas generated may not always be prevalent • Small sample for effort • Quiet individuals may be suppressed • Requires participation
Community Survey	Helps gather information about local attitudes regarding precisely defined issues, problems, or opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide distribution • Good for data analysis • Strong sample of the population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Requires skill/time • Suffers low response rate • Does not allow for detailed response
Secondary data analysis	Using data that has already been collected on a particular audience without having direct contact with that audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide insight about emerging trends or issues in a particular community • Data already exists • Fast and easy to access • Data available for many geographic levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in data • Requires inferences • Lack of data richness
Asset Mapping	A technique used to catalogue local community assets/resources to meet community objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to identify and utilize assets to better the community rather than focus on problems and needs • Focuses on what community already has • Provides diverse look at community assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community assets may not match key issue • People tend to respond to crises rather than possibilities