**How to Enable Lasting Community Health Improvements in 5 Steps**

The more you put into a community health needs assessment, the more you get out of it.

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The community health needs assessment has the potential to be a transformative driver for understanding and addressing the health needs of a hospital’s patient population — and meeting population health goals.

The more you put into a CHNA, the more you will get out. Sticking strictly to current Internal Revenue Service requirements will produce an adequate assessment of community needs. But elevating the CHNA process can help hospitals and health systems address their population’s medical and socioeconomic needs, setting the stage for lasting community health improvements.

5 Steps to Elevating Your Community Health Needs Assessment

The Health Research & Educational Trust has worked extensively with hospitals and health systems conducting CHNAs. We offer five recommendations to elevate your organization’s CHNA and maximize benefits:

1. **Engage patients and community members throughout the CHNA process.** Specifically including patient voices will solicit innovative insights into the community’s health needs. As active community members, trustees can provide their perspectives.
2. **Partner with other hospitals, public health departments and community organizations to augment the impact of the CHNA process.** The collective impact framework, described by John Kania and Mark Kramer in a 2011 paper (collaborationforimpact.com), demonstrates that individual organizations and sectors cannot tackle complex social issues — like improving community health — alone. When multiple organizations and sectors coalesce around a shared goal with complementary strategies, the impact is much greater than if they do it separately. The CHNA process helps organizations strategically align their approaches. Trustees can enlist their own organization to support the implementation strategy.
3. **Encourage hospital-wide involvement.** Since CHNAs are more effective when more stakeholders are involved, be sure to engage parts of the hospital outside community benefit departments, patient-family advisory councils and governing boards. Hospital-wide engagement will provide extra nuance for the assessment and more avenues to implement interventions. Trustees can find out where their hospital is in the assessment process and encourage an array of departments to get involved.
4. **Implement improvement strategies and integrate them into hospital strategy.** This is the crux of the CHNA process. Though improving access to care and preventing obesity may already be hospital priorities, the CHNA provides a platform to integrate strategies dealing with these issues into hospital operations. The process also creates an opportunity to consider how the hospital addresses the social determinants that affect community health. Trustee involvement with the CHNA process will ensure that identified needs are prioritized in developing the organization’s improvement strategies.
5. **Engage leadership to ensure the long-term impact of CHNAs.**HRET’s research has found that support from leadership is essential to moving the needle on community health improvement. When hospital leadership — the C-suite and trustees — buy in to the importance and potential impact of the CHNA process, the hospital can accelerate progress toward building a healthier community.

Hospital and health system trustees are uniquely positioned to elevate the role of the CHNA. Using the CHNA as a key component of population health strategy will support an organization-wide, systematic approach that links clinical and community issues. Collaboration is crucial to improving the health of our communities, and as a hospital trustee, your engagement in the process is key to achieving long-term success.

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