Five Strategies to Bring Your Community Health Needs Assessment to Life

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Having completed hundreds of community health needs assessments (CHNA) and implementation strategies with health care organizations, public health departments and community collaboratives, we know how important it is to make sure your CHNA is not sitting unread on a bookcase or website. Besides being painful for those of us who put so much effort into these documents, it’s also a great loss for the community who lose the insights contained in those pages.

**Turning your CHNA into a living document is a powerful way to support community health improvement and population health efforts that truly benefit the community. Here are five strategies to make it happen.**

1. **Engage leadership and board of directors**

Anyone who has worked for a hospital or in public health knows how hard it can be to get a topic in front of leadership.

The key is to create opportunity and interest for the board and other leaders to engage with the data from the CHNA.

One way to do this is through visual displays. Below is an example of a map from a community health needs assessment that highlights zip codes experiencing particularly high rates of potentially preventable hospital admissions.

A map like this can be posted in a conference room where leadership regularly meet to highlight communities experiencing poor health outcomes or barriers. Overlaying where employees live can make the map even more powerful — illustrating that investments in these communities can also benefit health system employees.

2. **Share your CHNA findings with other departments**

CHNAs provide a wealth of data and information for a range of health issues including mental health, substance use, chronic conditions and social determinants of health.

Share your CHNA with departments in your organization such as population health, human resources, business development and philanthropy to provide deeper knowledge about your community to support decision making and resource allocation.

A great way to do this is to seek out time with leaders or influencers in key areas of the organization — like strategy, clinical integration and population health. Learn about their goals and challenges.

Your CHNA can provide valuable findings about trends or disparities in chronic conditions, hospitalization rates and social determinants of health. Such data and insights into the patients and broader community can help inform strategies in other areas served by the health system — and integrate community health improvement and population health strategies for greater impact.
3. Engage partners from beginning to end
Having active involvement from the beginning of a process like the CHNA can mean increased capacity for and ownership of the process and deliverables. This includes internal hospital partners and community partners.

Create opportunities for active involvement throughout the CHNA process and beyond.

Develop and implement an engagement plan for hospital and collaborative partners. The plan can focus on capacity-building and provide a blueprint for ongoing work to keep stakeholders committed. It’s important to engage internal and external stakeholders early and often and move through the assessment process together.

Once the CHNA is completed, don’t forget to share the report with community leaders who contributed insights and perspectives to the primary data collection during the CHNA development process.

An online hub is a great place to post your CHNA, share evidenced-based practices, make data available, track program success, and communicate progress with stakeholders.

Having buy-in throughout the process will increase the likelihood that partners make use of the findings.

4. Use infographics or other data visualizations
Once the data is available, the question becomes: is it relatable? If people are overwhelmed by all the information packed into a CHNA it won’t get used to its full potential.

Finding creative ways to share data in easily digestible forms can be extremely helpful — whether it’s to get your idea across quickly or make data more accessible for non-data folks or groups where literacy may be a barrier.

Infographics summarizing key findings can help bring to life data buried within the pages of your reports to make it more understandable and actionable for you, your partners, policy makers and the community at large.

5. Make the connection to funding
Once the data is available, the question becomes: is it relatable? If people are overwhelmed by all the information packed into a CHNA it won’t get used to its full potential.

Your CHNA can be a valuable guide for grant funding to support communities. In addition to funding criteria, some community benefit programs have required applicants to review their most recent CHNA and target proposed activities toward identified priorities and gaps. Connecting your CHNA to your grant awards also makes it easier to be objective and strategic in the funding decision-making process.

CHNAs can also be leveraged to align and bring in funding for community health improvement efforts. Applications for funding often require data to demonstrate need, identify disparities and highlight proven partnerships — all elements that are available in a comprehensive CHNA.

This can be especially valuable if your CHNA is available on a web-based platform where data can be posted even after the CHNA is published. If you don’t have such a platform, make the link to your CHNA easily accessible on your website and let your partners know it’s there.

Think of your CHNA as much more than a compliance document — help it become a sought-after resource that drives improvement in your community’s health.

About Healthy Communities Institute

Conduent Healthy Communities Institute enables health-focused organizations to efficiently and measurably impact the populations they serve. The HCI platform includes more than 150 health, social, and economic indicators. HCI’s platform and consulting services help users gain insights from data, identify disparities, plan and implement initiatives, and collaborate and communicate to make a difference. The HCI Strategy Tracking Solution combines the expertise and support of public health consultants with the power of the leading strategy-tracking software.

To make localized population health data available to organizations on the front lines of the fight against coronavirus, HCI launched: HCI COVID-19 At-Risk Populations.

Contact Conduent Healthy Communities Institute at communityhealth@conduent.com.