

PERFORMING A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

Introduction to the Curriculum

“Here, then, is our shared dilemma and our shared challenge. Community leaders make differences they don't know how to measure. And academic researchers measure differences they don't know how to make! Each of us without the other is like the proverbial sound of one hand clapping.”

— David L. Katz, MD, MPH, FACPM, FACP. “Representing your community in community-based participatory research: differences made and measured.” *Preventing Chronic Disease* 1(1): 2004 Jan [December 15, 2003]. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2004/jan/katz.htm>

This curriculum provides the information needed to plan and conduct a public health assessment in your community. The six steps needed to create a Community Assessment Plan are presented. Each step is followed by a worksheet. Once completed, the worksheets become your Community Assessment Plan.

Curriculum Overview:

- **Introduction**
- **Step 1** – Develop a Community Partnership
- **Step 2** – Determine Your Focus
- **Step 3** – Determine the Information (Data) You Need
- **Step 4** – Determine How to Get the Information (Collect Data)
- **Step 5** – Determine How to Understand the Information (Analyze Data)
- **Step 6** – Determine How to Use and Communicate the Results
- **Appendices:**
 - A. Data Collection Methods:
 1. Asset Mapping
 2. Focus Groups
 3. Surveys
 4. Key Informant Interviews
 5. Community Forums
 6. Direct Observation and Photovoice
 - B. Computer Software to Compile and Analyze Data
 - C. Materials for Step 5 Data Analysis Exercises

- D. Ethical Considerations in Human Subjects Research
- E. Resources

What is a Community Assessment?

A Community Assessment, also called a “Community Needs Assessment,” is a process of collecting, analyzing and reporting information about the *needs* in a community as well as its *strengths* and *assets*. The purpose is to identify unmet community needs and plan ways to meet them.

A community assessment should be driven by community leaders and organizations, and actively involve community residents. An assessment can raise awareness about unmet community needs, can identify and prioritize areas for change, and can help your community to act on its own behalf. An assessment also builds skills around research, leadership, collaboration, and community involvement.

Why Do a Community Assessment?

There are many good reasons to conduct a community assessment, which may include:

- Identifying new community public health issues
- Understanding known community public health issues
- Learning more about the priorities, assets, and concerns of community members
- Offering solutions to address unmet health needs
- Collaborating with essential community health leaders and partner organizations
- Gaining community member support for health improvement solutions
- Convincing funders to provide needed resources
- Convincing policymakers and other decision-makers to provide your community with needed programs or services
- Your community asked you to do it
- You have already received funds to conduct a community assessment

Whatever your reason or reasons for conducting a community assessment, this curriculum provides the basic steps, tools and resources to help you through the process.

What Resources Will I Need to Conduct a Community Assessment?

This curriculum and planning process use a very collaborative approach. It is easier to conduct a community assessment if you build partnerships that share common interests and can contribute or share the resources necessary to conduct a community assessment. The size and the focus of the assessment is up to you and your partners. If a larger assessment is beyond the resources of your group, then you may consider a narrower focus. If a larger assessment is what is needed, then you may need to consider applying for a small grant to assist you. How to apply for funding is not included in this curriculum, but please see *Appendix E: Resources* (page 5-93) for sources of information on grant writing.

How Do I Use this Curriculum?

Whether you are starting from scratch, have already formed a community partnership, or have already started to conduct a community assessment—this curriculum will be useful to you. The following will help you get the most from this curriculum:

- 1. Complete each of the six step worksheets.** Complete them whether you have already started or are just beginning. They provide you with a complete Community Assessment Plan at the end of the process, and identify any major gaps in your approach.
- 2. Complete the six steps in the order best for your group.** You may want to determine your assessment focus (Step 2) before you identify community partners (Step 1). Just be sure to complete each step, as they are all necessary to plan and conduct an effective community assessment.
- 3. This is a dynamic process.** You may need to revisit the steps several times throughout the planning process, because you may find better ways to accomplish the previous steps. Checking your previous decisions ensures you are on track, and allows you to make changes as needed. This also helps you deal with conflicts or inconsistencies early on, and makes your job a lot easier!

TRAINING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal:

To help participants plan and conduct a community assessment.

Objectives:

Upon completion of this workshop participants are able to:

1. Develop a partnership to plan and conduct a community assessment
2. Develop goals and objectives to focus the community assessment
3. Identify good sources of secondary (existing) data and determine the need to collect primary (new) data
4. Identify appropriate methods for collecting primary data
5. Identify appropriate methods for analyzing quantitative and qualitative data
6. Identify appropriate ways to report results and identify target audiences
7. Complete a community assessment plan

SIX STEPS TO A COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT PLAN

This curriculum includes six steps to plan and conduct a community public health assessment. These steps are necessary for conducting a thorough assessment, and will provide you with the instructions and tools for each step along the way. Use each section's planning activities. Fill out the worksheets at the end of each section. These six worksheets will become a realistic and achievable *Community Assessment Plan*.

