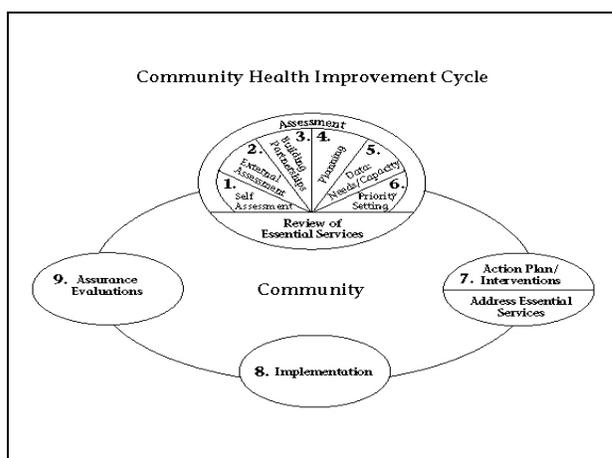


What is Community Health Assessment?

Community health assessment is the ongoing process of identifying and analyzing a community's health problems, needs and assets, as well as its resources and capacity to address priority needs. Information obtained for the community health assessment is used to set priorities and to make decisions about program or organizational improvement and allocation of resources through the development of a community health action plan.

Community health assessment and program planning is not an end product in itself, but is part of a process that provides information that is on-going and continuously monitored. There are many models for community health assessment. This model - Community Health Improvement Cycle, developed by the Ohio Department of Health uses the following nine steps:



- Step One:** Self-assessment (capacity assessment)
- Step Two:** External assessment
- Step Three:** Partnership building
- Step Four:** Planning for data collection
- Step Five:** Data collection and analysis
- Step Six:** Priority setting
- Step Seven:** Intervention planning
- Step Eight:** Implementation
- Step Nine:** Evaluation

Step One: Self Assessment is an appraisal of the capacity and/or readiness of an organization to initiate and participate in a Community Health Improvement Cycle. The value of a capacity assessment is that it provides the organization the opportunity to recognize the need to build capacity, examine strengths and weaknesses, and initiate long-term planning to bridge gaps. Self-assessment tells the organization whether technical, financial and/or staff support are available, whether the governing or other executive body is supportive, and whether capacity needs are completely understood.

Step Two: External Assessment determines to what degree adequate organizational and individual commitments and resources are available and if your community is ready to undertake a community assessment.

Step Three: Partnership Building, also known as a coalition or a consortium, is a group of organizations and individuals working together in a common effort to make more effective and efficient use of resources.

Step Four: Planning the needs assessment is a prospective process that is done in order to know what information to gather. Planning is essential for each step of the community health assessment process and involves asking the following questions: What do we want to know about our community's health? How will we find the information to answer these questions? How does our community's health compare to other communities, the state and the nation? What are the issues/problems we should analyze further?

Step Five: Data: Needs/Capacity is needed to document the community's health status, its needs and its resources and capacity for improving the health of all its residents. Data are collected to describe "what is" in a community and to compare this to "what ought to be". Data do not "speak for themselves." They must be analyzed and interpreted. A critical part of the assessment process is translating data about problems, risk factors, resources and costs into terms that facilitate decision making. An even more critical step is melding the "numbers" data with the perceived needs and wishes of the community into that decision making process.

Step Six: Priority Setting allows a community to consider its most pressing problems, because resources are not likely to be available to address all problems identified. After health problems are identified, an objective method to rank or prioritize those problems is needed so that the most important can be addressed first. A community's efforts will be successful if they are focused on a limited number of concerns. Community leadership must be involved in the prioritization process. Their participation will foster active community ownership and commitment to the priority health problems.

Step Seven: Intervention Plan is a strategy, a usable plan of action, or program developed to achieve a preplanned purpose such as the improvement of health, knowledge, behavior, attitudes and practice. Interventions are developed after the prioritization of health problems has been completed. It is important to think through the entire sequence of interacting factors that contribute to the problem, to identify community resources to address the problem, to identify barriers to reducing the problem and then to develop one or more specific interventions or corrective actions intended to reduce the problem.

Step Eight: Implementation Plan includes all the ways your intervention/action plan/program plan will be executed, including financing, marketing and building coalitions of appropriate agencies/individuals to carry out your stated objectives and activities. If the steps to get community buy-in were undertaken in the development of the intervention plan, there is more likelihood of community ownership in the process.

Step Nine: Evaluation is the process of collecting and examining information (quantitative and qualitative) to determine the accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses of an intervention, a plan or program. In the simplest terms, evaluation is a process or activity that involves assessing or measuring the value of something. Evaluation answers the questions: "Are we doing the right things?" and "Are we doing things right?"