



**Quality Improvement
Organizations**

Sharing Knowledge. Improving Health Care.
CENTERS FOR MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES

SUPERIOR HEALTH
Quality Alliance

FOUNDATION FOR ACTION—GUIDANCE
FOR THRIVING IN HEALTH CARE TODAY
Community Needs Assessment



SUPERIOR HEALTH QUALITY ALLIANCE ACTION GUIDE

Conducting a Community Needs Assessment

This tool is the third in the series, Foundation for Action – Guidance for Thriving in Health Care Today and organized by four foundational areas: Facilitate the Initiative, Calibrate the Team, Translate Evidence into Practice and Ensure a Smooth Rollout and Adoption of Best Practices. This assessment will help you and your team identify opportunities to dive into how to conduct a community needs assessment and build programs around that assessment.

What is a Community Needs Assessment?

A community needs assessment (CNA) is a way of collecting data and questioning stakeholders to understand gaps in community services, along with strengths and assets available within your community. It allows for the identification of key needs and issues through systematic, comprehensive data collection and analysis. A needs assessment requires a multi-step strategy that typically involves defining a population and gathering data based on a set of indicators.

Community needs assessments use principles such as:

- Collaboration to support shared ownership in every step of the strategy (e.g. assessment, planning, investment, implementation and evaluation).
- Proactive, broad and diverse community engagement to improve results.
- A definition of community that encompasses a significant enough area to allow for population-wide interventions and measurable results, with a targeted focus on addressing disparities among subpopulations.
- Maximum transparency to support community engagement and accountability.
- Use of evidence-based interventions and encouragement of innovative practices.
- Ongoing evaluation to inform a continuous improvement process.
- Leverage high quality and timely data pooled from, and shared among, diverse public and private sources.

How to Use this Assessment

Use this resource to assess and create a long-term action plan to address public health problems based on the results of the CNA. An action plan is typically updated every three to five years.

Assessing and Addressing Community Needs



Step 1

DEFINE YOUR COMMUNITY

Who are the people and the places that make up your community? Define your community to systematically assess who should be involved and to help set the scope of your CNA. Consider these questions when defining your community:

1. Population
 - a. What is the demographic makeup of your community?
 - b. Which community members are at risk?
 - c. What assets do our community members offer?
2. Attitudes and values
 - a. What do the people in your community care about?
 - b. What beliefs are important to consider and respect?
 - c. What are the local attitudes toward certain issues?
 - d. What biases may some hold?
3. Place
 - a. How will your plan address and respect the places that are important?
 - b. What infrastructure exists?
 - c. Is there an attribute of the location that should be addressed or improved?

Step 2

IDENTIFY COMMUNITY ASSETS

Helpful, knowledgeable people, important places and useful tools are central in identifying and capturing your community needs and challenges. You can also discover many resources that are already available to the community.

Community resources, or assets, can be anything that helps to improve the quality of life of the individuals who live in your community. Resources and assets can be:

1. People
 - a. Lawmakers, volunteers, community leaders and simply anyone can be an asset to a community.
 - b. Local Facebook groups, volunteer centers, faith-based organizations, universities and neighborhood associations are made up of like-minded individuals who can offer their skills, expertise or time.
2. Organizations and Associations
 - a. Nonprofit organizations, local businesses, governing institutions, cultural societies, schools and all the programs that contribute to improving the quality of life for residents.
 - b. If you are unsure about relevant associations in your geographical area, try an internet search or asking community nonprofits and volunteer centers if they have information or referrals to offer.
3. Places
 - a. Any place, building or landscape can be a resource. Libraries, shelters, health centers and public gardens make communities better places to live.
 - b. Identify physical locations and how the use of those spaces benefits the community.
4. Equipment and Tools
 - a. Things like food donations, safety equipment, public transportation, free internet or books are all tools that can improve the quality of life for community members.

When discovering assets, start by identifying and engaging existing resources, like community organizations and individuals that already provide community services or support. Then, gather your team to brainstorm potential resources and partnerships with associations, organizations and other groups.

Step 3

COLLECT COMMUNITY DATA

Your CNA community data collection tools can include information gathered through interviews, focus groups and questionnaires to help you understand the perceived and expressed needs of your community. Questionnaires empower participants to get involved in community development. They can also provide both qualitative data (like observations, ideas and feelings) and quantitative data (like statistics).

Qualitative Data Collection

Questions that produce qualitative data may look something like this:

- What services and programs would you like your local library to provide?
- What time, skills or expertise can you offer as a community volunteer?
- What parks and recreation services and programs do you enjoy? Which services are relevant to you and your family? Which ones do you feel need improvement? In what ways?
- Has food insecurity affected you or your family in the past year? If so, how?

Qualitative data can provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist within your community.

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative questions have limited answers that can be tallied (or quantified), giving a quick snapshot of a topic. It's also easier to measure, summarize and track over time.

Questionnaires that produce quantitative data may look something like this:

- On a scale from 1-10, how well do you feel your family is supported by public services? 1 = not supported at all, 10 = my family is given everything they need to succeed.
- In the past month, how often have you used your local library's public services? Very often, sometimes, not very often or never.
- How many times per month do you volunteer in the community?
- How many parks and recreation services have you used in the past year?
- Do you feel your neighborhood has access to enough healthy grocery options? Yes or No?

The downside of this kind of data is that you may get a more limited understanding of an issue than if you were to learn about people's thoughts, stories and ideas.

Questionnaire Types

Consider the type of questionnaires that best suits your team's needs. Generally, there are three types:

1. **Case Studies** collect information from a portion of a group of people that represent the voice of a larger group or community. Case studies are more in-depth and provide qualitative data and stories to help inform your CNA. They are effective in providing data on perceived needs.
2. **Population Sampling** asks a subgroup of people to answer questions that you provide. Sampling, when performed correctly, should reflect similar results to the ones you would receive if you would have asked the entire group, making population sampling more efficient.
3. **Census Questionnaires** are distributed to every member of the population you're hoping to learn about. Census questionnaires give you the most accurate information but will require more significant resources to conduct, especially if your population is vast. Therefore, a census questionnaire is more effective when conducted in smaller groups, such as all patients/residents at a particular facility as opposed to all residents of a city.

The type of questionnaire chosen will depend on the types of needs you want to assess, as well as your team's capacity for distributing and collecting questionnaires.

Listening Sessions and Public Forums

Listening and participating in community gatherings like town meetings and other forums are a great way to learn about perspectives on local issues. In these cases, you or a member of your team will simply listen and record information that you feel is pertinent to your CNA.

This type of information gathering is useful for understanding perceived and expressed needs.

Direct or Participatory Observation

At times, it can be helpful to understand a need or challenge firsthand. Participatory data gathering requires your team to take part in an activity, observe a gathering or speak to community members directly in a way that is less formal than a questionnaire.

Your team will need to take detailed notes, and it may help to use a recording device if it's allowed. To collect data, visit community spaces, like senior centers, shelters and food pantries to observe, speak with individuals and participate in programs that already exist.

The downside of this method is that information is subject to participant bias, as individuals may perceive an experience differently. For this reason, multiple people and types of organizations representing a range of backgrounds and viewpoints should participate in the data collection process. Additionally, each voice should be weighed equitably to reach a common vision and mission that leverages the greatest community improvements.

Using Existing Data

Gathering quantitative data can be especially time-consuming. Luckily, there is plenty of community-based data collected by experts available already. You may look for statistics regarding demographics, as well as incident rates, prevalence rates and growth over time specific to the needs that emerge. The following resources are great places to start:

- U.S. Census
- Public health data
- School district records

Many local libraries house a wealth of community-specific information. Whether you're looking to address food security rates or community health, quantitative data can support qualitative findings and validate anecdotal evidence. A CNA usually results in a community needs report that summarizes data, findings and recommendations. These assessments may be administered by state health departments.

Step 4

COMPILE A COMMUNITY NEEDS REPORT

How to Organize Your CNA Findings

Before writing the report, gather the data from your team's interviews, questionnaires and observations. Identify any observed trends or patterns. To help make sense of the data, you can organize it into the following categories:

- **Strengths** — The *internal* strengths of your organization, team, stakeholders and initiative.
 - Example: Your community maintains robust community partnerships that work collaboratively to serve low-income residents.
- **Challenges** — The *internal* weaknesses or threats facing your organization or team.
 - Example: Time constraints for volunteer management staff and lack of volunteer retention strategy lead to higher turnover rates and lower return on investment.
- **Needs** — The *external* challenges, needs and gaps in services/supports that exist in the community. Your team's mission should work to address these needs and fill gaps.
 - Example: There is a lack of follow-up support for low-income families.

- **Opportunities** — The *external* strengths and resources in the community available (or potentially available) to residents.
 - Example: Programs directed toward low-income families in similar communities experienced an increase in funding last year.

CNA Report Outline

After compiling data, you'll be able to populate a report that summarizes your method, findings and recommendations.

The report should include the following sections:

1. **Key Players:** Overview of assessment participants and program partners involved.
2. **Methodology:** Summary of the methods used to collect data.
3. **Participation:** Description of the demographic and number of individuals represented in the data collected. For example: How many individuals responded to your questionnaire? How many focus group sessions were held?
4. **Strengths and Limitations:** What are the strengths of the needs assessment and its results? How are the needs assessment and its results limited? What challenges were faced during the process of conducting a needs assessment?
5. **Data and Key Findings:** This section will make up the bulk of your report. Discuss the gaps, strengths and challenges discovered in the community needs assessment. Present data and case studies. What opportunities did you uncover?
6. **Recommendations and Next Steps:** Based on key findings, what are your recommendations for addressing community gaps and needs? How will your proposed program address these needs? What information do you want to communicate to stakeholders?

Step 5

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Your team's CNA can inform on any type of community development. So, gather your team to create an *action plan* that drives your initiative forward.

The outcomes of your assessment and resulting recommendations can usually be organized into three categories:

Policy or Guidance

These are laws or policies that work to change behaviors.

Example: Through public records, a local nonprofit discovers that 80% of the district's children under the age of 18 are food insecure. The nonprofit creates a program that campaigns to lower the household income threshold to receive free school lunches. As a result of these efforts, the school board enacts new policies and increases its lunch program budget.

Larger System Changes

These are strategies that result in larger systemic changes to social norms, institutions or standard practices.

Example: A questionnaire reveals that 30% of low-income families with school-aged children aren't aware of their children's eligibility for free school lunches, so a local organization campaigns to target awareness and reaches out to community families, helping them to apply for benefits.

Social, Economic or Physical Changes

These are changes designed to influence people's behavior.

Example: Through conversations with local pediatricians, a nonprofit after-school program learns that many of the community's school-aged children aren't getting enough of the nutrients they need to thrive. This leads them to implement a fundraising campaign that will provide children who participate in their after-school programming with healthy snack options.

The type of action you will take should be deeply rooted in the findings of your assessment.

Your process for creating an action plan may look something like this:

1. Choose the key findings you want your program to focus on.
2. Identify an intended activity or response for each key finding, all working toward addressing the need.
3. Denote a champion responsible for carrying out each activity and establish clear deadlines.
4. Determine indicators of success. Indicators of success are metrics indicating that your program has completed the activity or accomplished a goal.

One example on how to organize an action plan:

KEY FINDINGS	ACTIVITY/ RESPONSE	TIMELINE	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Example: Lack of follow-up food insecurity support for low-income families.	Review our existing food insecurity programs.	March 1	Program coordinators, board members	List of concrete needs of program participants (i.e. fresh fruits and vegetables).
	Meet with former participants in the program (strive for 7-10 participants).	2x forums, March, April	Program coordinators	
	Develop and send questionnaires.	Send March 1. Retrieve responses by May 1.	[individual name(s)]	

RESOURCES

How to use the following resources

The following resources have been designed to help conduct a community needs assessment and compile a report that communicates findings.

- The **Community Needs Assessment Checklist** will guide you through the process of conducting and reporting on your community needs assessment.
- The **Community Needs Assessment Form** can be used to question community members (“participants”) who will help your team identify gaps in service based on their unique viewpoints and expertise.
- Refer to the **Community Needs Assessment Report** to compile a report. This report should guide key decision-making that goes into developing a program(s) to meet the needs of the community.
- Use the **Community Needs Assessment Action Plan Table Template** to strategize your response to the assessment findings.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Organization Name: _____

<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Establish Community Needs Assessment Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Outline goals for community needs assessment. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish scope and participants of assessment. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify data sources and process for using data. <input type="checkbox"/> Allocate roles and responsibilities to assessment team members.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Distribute Community Needs Assessment Form to Participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Gather and review assessment data. <input type="checkbox"/> Identify community assets.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Compile Results Using Community Needs Assessment Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Distribute report to stakeholders and decision makers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Implement Program Plan Using the Community Needs Assessment Action Plan Template</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate action plan objectives and timeline. <input type="checkbox"/> Allocate roles and responsibilities to team members. <input type="checkbox"/> Track progress and objectives.

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM

This Community Needs Assessment Form is designed to help us understand community needs and gaps in service. Your input will help us direct our community services to help fill these gaps.

Please complete all sections to the best of your ability. Information is kept confidential. Thank you for taking the time to help us make this community a happier, healthier place to live.

Organization Name: _____

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name _____

Occupation _____

Community Role _____

City/Town/Village _____

State/ZIP _____

Age

- Under 18
 18-24
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55-64
 65-74
 75+

Gender _____ Race _____

Ethnicity _____

Education

- Grades 0-8
 Grades 9-12 (non-graduate)
 High School Graduate
 Associate Degree
 Bachelors Degree
 Masters or Doctorate Degree

Military Status

- Active
 Veteran
 N/A

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM - PAGE 2

Identify the three most important needs for each category. Place numbers 1 through 3 in the “#” column beside the most important needs. Write “1” next to the most important need, “2” next to the second most important need and “3” next to the third most important. Leave the rest blank.

Please select only three needs per category.	
#	HOUSING
	More monthly rental assistance programs.
	Increased availability of security/utility deposit programs.
	More counseling resources for homeowners.
	Grants to make home ownership more affordable.
	Programs to provide free home repair.
	More income-based rental housing for disabled individuals and seniors.
	More community support for homeless families.
	More community support for homeless veterans.
	Other:
#	HEALTH
	More community focus on preventative health care.
	Provide more education on maintaining personal hygiene.
	More payment assistance programs for adult dental and/or hearing services.
	More vision assistance programs for adults.
	Increasing the community awareness of available health resources.
	Early childhood nutrition education.
	Emphasis on reinforcing healthy eating habits in schools.
	Affordable nutritional counseling.
	More awareness of available food resources.
	More assistance and resources for victims of domestic violence.
	Other:

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM - PAGE 3

Please select only three needs per category.	
#	EDUCATION
	More parents involved in students' education.
	Affordable school readiness programs.
	Accessible school counseling for graduating students.
	More certificate/degree programs offered locally.
	Affordable transportation options to and from school.
	Affordable high-quality childcare options for parents who want to further their education.
	Increase community's awareness of available education resources.
	Other:
#	EMPLOYMENT
	More jobs with better pay and benefits.
	More training for the types of jobs available in the area.
	Affordable transportation to and from jobs.
	Affordable childcare during work hours.
	Increasing community's knowledge of employment resources.
	Improving workforce readiness skills of individuals entering workforce.
	Other:

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM - PAGE 4

Please select only three needs per category.	
#	INCOME and ASSET BUILDING
	Anonymous and confidential budget counseling.
	More education on how to build assets.
	Information on how to access free credit counseling.
	More certificate/degree programs offered locally.
	Anonymous and confidential savings counseling.
	More information on how to access financial resources.
	Increasing the community's knowledge of available mainstream financial resources.
	Other:
#	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
	Increasing the community's skills and knowledge for leadership development.
	More citizenship classes.
	More education on how to join neighborhood associations, community boards, advisory groups or similar organizations.
	Increase awareness of civic activities.
	Other:

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM - PAGE 5

Please select only three needs per category.	
#	SUPPORT SERVICES
	Child support
	Legal services
	Youth services
	Meal programs
	Life skills programs
	Substance abuse services
	Emotional abuse services
	Physical abuse services
	Transportation services
	Other:

Which of the following areas require the most funding and support?

- Housing
- Health
- Education
- Employment
- Income and asset building
- Civic engagement
- Support Services

Other: _____

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

This table can be used as a guide to organize your community needs assessment findings.

Organization Name: _____	
Needs Assessment and Key Players Overview	
Community	
Dates of Assessment	
Project Partners	
Methodology – Which methods of data collection were used:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires <input type="checkbox"/> Statistical Data <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Reports <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Case Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
Participation	
Participant demographics	
Number of questionnaire participants	
Number of case study participants	
Number of focus group participants	
Assessment Strengths and Limitations	
Strengths	
Limitations	
Number of case study participants	
Number of focus group participants	
Key Findings	
Data	
Gaps in Services	
Community strengths	
Community challenges	
Recommendations	
Recommendations	
Next steps	
Proposed programs	
Conclusion	

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FORM ACTION PLAN

This table is designed to help organize your Community Needs Assessment findings and plan your identified program(s). Use a separate table to help plan each program.

Organization Name: _____				
Program: _____				
KEY FINDINGS	ACTIVITY/ RESPONSE	TIMELINE	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

www.superiorhealthqa.org | Follow us on social media @health_superior