

Collaboration, Not Competition: Unique Partnerships for Community Health Assessment

Challenge

Tax-exempt hospitals are required to complete a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) every three years. The information gathered through the assessment process is used to develop strategies that improve community health. In 2012, the City of Sioux Falls completed its first formal CHNA by inviting community partners from all sectors to come together to participate in the assessment process, including Avera Health and Sanford Health. However, due to regulations for non-profit hospitals, both health systems had also completed their own CHNA reports, which meant that there were three different assessments completed for Sioux Falls. With the passage of the Affordable Care Act came a greater emphasis to work with public health, so the health systems reached out to the City of Sioux Falls Health Department to explore how one, collaborative CHNA could be completed. One of the key “lessons learned” was that when you have a project involving a diverse group of partners, including two strong organizations from the same industry, factors such as open communication and trust become essential to the project's success.

Solution

To address the challenges of planning and implementing a collaborative CHNA, a series of planning meetings were held with representatives from all three organizations to review the data and methodology from the previous separate reports, and hopes and concerns related to undertaking one, collaborative report were shared openly. Those initial planning meetings, while challenging, also resulted in great conversation about how each partner was committed to improving the health of the residents and community.

This project brought together a government entity and two competing health systems that have unique approaches to doing business. That factor alone made this effort innovative and unique. By looking at how each organization completed its own CHNA in 2012, we were able to identify the strengths and resources each partner brought to the table.

Summary

So often, our community only sees “competition” between the two health systems through their respective marketing campaigns, building projects, and news stories. However, the two hospital CEOs stood together with the Sioux Falls Public Health Director to kick-off the effort at a news conference in 2015 and then again in 2016 to celebrate the completion of the report. This collaboration resulted in a broader reach to community partners during the assessment process, better analysis of the data, and a greater ability to tell the health story of the community. We were able to get beyond the “competition” and focus on how collaboration with open communication and respect can not only result in a printed report to be proud of, but also action items to work on together to positively impact our residents and the environment around them. Leadership from the City of Sioux Falls, Avera and Sanford all recognized the benefits of this unique and innovative collaboration, and that recognition expanded beyond our city limits when the team was invited to present on the experience at a national health care conference.

Results

After nearly 18 months of planning, collecting data, writing, editing...and editing some more, the CHNA report was released to the community in June 2016. The visible results were a 100-page report with supporting documents, as well as a summary "infographic" of the assessment findings. While the response to the report was overwhelmingly positive, what was even more valuable to the community was seeing the two health systems and the city come together to complete the assessment. We have enjoyed continued collaboration while implementing priority strategies over the past two years. In addition, we have nurtured an ongoing relationship that has brought us to the next CHNA cycle, which we are again embarking on together as partners.

- Live Well Sioux Falls developed a monthly fruit and vegetable promotion, as well as a free grocery store tour program, to encourage residents to eat healthy.
- The City of Sioux Falls passed an ordinance regulating smoking and tobacco use on city property to help reduce tobacco use and reduce exposure to secondhand smoke.
- As part of Hayward THRIVE, we expanded the school garden at Hayward Elementary school, completed a series of neighborhood engagement sessions and walk audits, implemented street calming measures near the school and installed a new bus shelter across from the school.
- To launch the Sioux Empire Network of Care, The Helpline Center assumed the lead role to implement a shared software solution among non-profit organizations. The agencies that are part of the pilot program collect data in one system and share a common intake form to communicate and coordinate among agencies while keeping a focus on client privacy.

Key Components

Making an impact in public health and changing health behaviors takes time and requires a systematic approach looking at many factors that impact our health and quality of life. To design programs and services to meet residents' health needs, we needed to understand the environment in which they work, go to school, and spend their time. We agreed that a fair way to approach a collaborative CHNA was to have each organization lead a component of the data collection work. This work took place over a period of about 18 months. We met at least monthly, by phone or in person during the early phase of the work, with more frequent conversations as we started to compile data.

- * Avera Health: facilitated focus groups and key stakeholder interviews, including inviting participants, working with a local facilitator to develop questions, and completing the final report.
- * Sanford Health: conducted a resident survey in cooperation with researchers from North Dakota State University, which also was working with Sanford on a similar project in Fargo, ND.
- * Sioux Falls Health Department: facilitated community sector conversations using the Good & Healthy Community Assessment tool and coordinated secondary data review. The health department also took the lead on writing the report and working with the city's multimedia services office to complete the report design and printing.

Evidence Based Interventions

The CHNA process itself used evidence-based strategies, including a survey that was representative of the MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) population, formal focus groups, the use of the Good & Healthy Community Assessment tool and review of secondary data from proven research sources. While each partner has its own implementation plan with strategies appropriate to their organization, the collaborative CHNA work resulted in identifying three primary interventions to focus on as community partners:

1. Community-based Behavioral Health Strategies: Support efforts to address behavioral health needs, including access to behavioral health services, referrals to behavioral health services, coordination of care, and public education and awareness about mental health.
2. Hayward THRIVE: Implement a pilot project to address social determinants of health in the Hayward neighborhood of Sioux Falls. This includes developing strategies in obesity, access to care, the built environment, behavioral health, and engaging neighborhood residents to address community health.
3. Sioux Empire Network of Care: Support development of a coordinated social service system through a community collaboration.

NEXT STEPS

Work is underway for the next CHNA to be released in 2019. We have established a timeline and developed the tasks each partner will be responsible for during the data collection phase. For communities working on a CHNA, we encourage you to start early! Set a target date for having the work complete and then develop a timeline that will help you meet that goal. For collecting data and gathering feedback from residents and stakeholders, “cast the net wide” when it comes to inviting others to be part of the effort. Ensure you are hearing from a cross-section of your community.

Resources:

www.livewellsiouxfalls.org/about-us

“ This was a thorough and worthwhile process. We are truly grateful for the many community members who worked together on collecting this data, and we look forward to working with them to develop effective and appropriate strategies to create a healthier place to live, work, learn, and play. ”

- Jill Franken,
Public Health Director for
the City of Sioux Falls

“ We see great value in coming together with Avera and with the Sioux Falls Health Department, through its Live Well Sioux Falls initiative, to learn more about our community and to work together to improve the health and well-being of our residents. ”

- Paul Hanson,
President, Sanford USD
Medical Center

“ On the national level, the expectation for hospitals to play an active role in the overall health of their communities has become an even higher priority. As health care providers, the Avera Health system and the Sanford Health system are committed to providing the highest quality of care for our patients. ”

-Dr. David Kapaska,
former Regional President and
CEO of Avera McKennan Hospital &
University Health Center (retired)

