

INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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What is a Community Health Needs Assessment?

A CHNA is a systemic process that allows communities and health care organizations to identify health needs. The process involves collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. CHNAs result in a big picture understanding of population health and drive community health work and hospital funding in the direction of need. CHNAs are often the guiding document for communities' community health improvement planning (CHIP) process and the collaborative glue between health organizations.

CHNAs provide:

1. Improved organizational and community coordination and collaboration
2. Increased knowledge about public health and the interconnectedness of activities
3. Strengthened partnerships within state and local public health systems
4. Identified strengths and weaknesses to address in quality improvement efforts
5. Benchmarks for public health practice improvements. CHNAs are commonly administered hospitals. Federal law requires tax-exempt hospitals to complete a CHNA every three years.

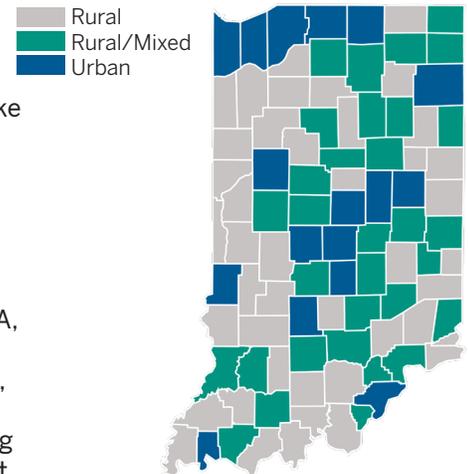
Current Policy Interventions

The only federal enforcement of the CHNA process occurs via the IRS. Hefty penalties for lack of compliance and threats of lost tax-exempt status function as the primary motivator for hospital adherence. Some states have expanded upon federal requirements by providing guidance, increasing penalties, and incentivizing participation. Ten states have implemented state statutes that increase the collaborative nature of the CHNA, requiring:

- Mandatory consultations with public health professionals
- Representation of all community members
- Input from local health departments and more.

Implications for Indiana

With a large portion of the state composed of rural communities (see image A), it is important to take into account how these processes impact rural communities. Rural communities throughout the state do not have access to hospitals, leaving them out of the needs assessment process. Without a hospital to take the lead on a CHNA, the process can be costly, time-consuming, and difficult to sustain, often leading to communities that do not have CHNAs or CHIPs. Being absent from the needs assessment process results in communities that are unaware of their pressing health needs and lacking data to drive and fund prevention strategies.



Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations will foster stronger partnerships between hospital administration, local health departments, and community organizations to produce efficient, more useful CHNAs that result in CHIPs that can be used to improve community health outcomes. This provides communities with more comprehensive CHNAs, and helps distribute the work of the CHNA/CHIP processes while building stronger networks to implement CHIPs.

For Rural Hospital Administrators:

- Invest time and resources into community partnership development and collaborative initiatives.
- Set internal guidelines for the CHNA process that include but are not limited to;
 - Sectors that must be represented
 - Develop a CHNA board to ensure inclusivity

For State Legislature:

- Allocate funding to local health departments to increase funding for collaboration on CHNAs within their county.
- Allocate funding to local health departments to sponsor trainings including but not limited to coalition development, partnership building, and resource sharing