



Community Engagement & Leadership

The Buncombe County Department of Health and Health Partners, Buncombe County's Healthy Carolinians community health coalition, facilitated the assessment process throughout 2009 and 2010. We used an intentional strategy of engaging community members and leaders at every stage. Community members helped to decide what kinds of information to gather and from whom, participated in designing surveys and actually gathering data, reviewed primary and secondary data collected, and selected priorities. A team of community members and leaders also participated in an additional strategic innovation, the Healthy Living project (see page 111). In total, over 700 community residents participated in this community health assessment. Over one hundred and fifty community members and organizational partners helped guide this Community Health Assessment. An additional 228 residents offered between 20 and 40 minutes of their time to complete an in-person, in-depth Community Health Survey and another 401 county residents completed a short health opinions survey.

Early planning, Health Partners volunteers, And designing the Community Health Survey

The 2010 Buncombe County Community Health Assessment process kicked off with an initial session that was offered as part of the 2009 Health Partners annual meeting. A variety of community and organizational volunteers donated their time, opinions, and expertise for six months, from the spring to the fall of 2009. This team helped frame the overall focus on the process and created the survey instrument for the in-depth Community Health Survey.

The entire Health Partners – Healthy Carolinians coalition membership of 325 community volunteers and organizational representatives was invited to participate in the Community Health Assessment. Over 60 people volunteered on the early planning team in varying capacities. See a list of team members in Appendix A. Participation at most meetings was approximately 25-30 people.

Much of the very early planning and discussion focused on how to make the Community Health Assessment process as beneficial to the local community as possible. Volunteers also wanted to create the CHA itself to serve as a tool that could truly drive health improvement. The group, along with CHA staff, decided early on to frame the process and report around issues such as primary prevention, looking for ways to measure well-being, reducing disease, engaging residents in making healthy choices, and measuring health improvement so that our community would know what strides we were making as well as where we needed additional efforts. Team members also asked for a CHA report that they could more easily use. They offered suggestions such as making specific data pieces available on-line in numerous small chunks instead of simply offering one huge file of the full report. Based on this feedback, a downloadable fact sheet for each section of data will be posted on-line on the Department of Health website in early 2011.



Many members of this early planning team also participated in creating the survey tool for the Buncombe County Community Health Survey. For more information about the survey, see Appendix B. For a copy of the survey tool, see Appendix F.

Strategy Team

From fall 2009 to spring 2010, a smaller group invested significant time and energy learning a new process and applying it to one of the health issues that the early planning team felt sure would arise as one of Buncombe County's health priorities: obesity. This small group was able to test out a different way of long-term problem solving called health systems analysis. The Department of Health and Health Partners engaged Doc Klein, founder and CEO of Uncharted Territories, a national systems analysis consulting firm based in Asheville. Klein led the Strategy Team through a six month interactive process to identify all of the key pieces or systems that play a role in whether or not community members became overweight or obese. An organizational development grant was secured from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina in late 2009 that enabled Klein to transition from a volunteer to a paid consultant.

Midway through the process, the group made an intentional decision to shift from ***organizing their efforts to react to the problem*** (obesity) to ***focusing their attention on creating the good health they were striving towards***. In addition, based on input from wellness coaches and nutritionists, the Strategy Team changed to a process that would strive to create a community where all residents could live a healthy life – and not to simply focus on weight. The effort was renamed the Healthy Living project. For a full description of the Healthy Living project, see the Strategic Innovation – Healthy Living project section of this report on page 111.

Community Health Assessment Steering Committee

A Steering Committee was created to review information, determine what additional data was needed in order to be strategic about creating well-being in the Buncombe community, and to set priorities for the Community Health Assessment. The Buncombe County Health Director (also current Board Chair of Health Partners) extended the invitation to participate in the CHA Steering Committee to over 200 community leaders. Invitees included, for example: leaders in the faith community, business community, non-profit community, schools and higher education, medical and health community, and local government and elected officials. Sixty-eight leaders joined the Steering Committee. Each of the four meetings in 2010 engaged about 20-30 participants.

Instead of creating a list of priorities that were problems to address, this CHA process has focused instead on identifying what pieces of a healthy community we want to CREATE. For this reason, the Steering Committee also identified a list of overarching themes – frames to be applied to each of the six priority health issues identified. The Steering Committee has requested that each of these themes be



addressed in the action planning to take place around each of the priority health issues. This will serve to focus the efforts of the future planning groups on equity, prevention, large-scale impact, and more. For more information about the overarching themes, see page 12.

See Appendix A, page 121, for a list of Community Health Assessment 2010 Steering Committee members.

Listening Sessions and Community Health Opinion Survey

Once the Steering Committee had narrowed a list of potential priorities down to approximately 10-12 issues, staff created a survey to use for gathering broad public input. The intent was to engage many community residents in the process of narrowing the priorities down to a short list. Over 400 county residents completed the survey either on line or in person during listening sessions. For more details on the listening sessions and opinion survey, see Appendix C.