NEEDS ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Source: A Guidebook for Evaluating School-Based Health Centers
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The needs assessment is a crucial process for identifying the needs of the community, as well as the methods for best addressing those needs. We also recognize that in conducting such an assessment it is as important for you to identify service and community assets, as well as service gaps that may exist in your community's health care delivery system.

- Keep your stakeholders involved throughout the process.
- Continue to collect data until you have obtained an in-depth profile of the school (or community).
- Review the information you gather with stakeholders to interpret the data.
- Involve as many sections of the community as possible.
- Involve the community members themselves in collecting the data, if appropriate.

Needs and Assets Assessment Questions

What is the nature of the problem?
Which are the groups in greatest need in the community (or school)?

- What are the biggest health problems and/or concerns for the students?
- What are the specific health problems the community faces?
- What portions of the community experience these problems?
- What kinds of services are needed?

What existing services address the problem?

- What community and school health resources already exist?
- Which health facilities are most used and why?
- Are there services to match each of the problems the community faces?
- How are services coordinated?
- What segments of the population find it most difficult to get services?
- What are the barriers to care for students and families?
- What service gaps exist?
- Is the community satisfied with the current set of services?

How have previously implemented programs worked?

- What interventions and/or techniques have worked before? Why?
- What interventions have not worked very well? Why?
- What other program models exist around the country that could be adapted to meet your community's needs?

What program factors need to be considered for implementing the program?

- Would the SBHC or another service model be best suited to meet student needs?
- What resources are available to meet these needs?
- Will you need additional funding to meet the needs?
- What resources, other than financial, will you need to fill service gaps?
- Who are the key persons that need to be involved in program planning and implementation?
Needs Assessment Methods
After constructing the questions you want to answer in your needs assessment and establishing a timeline, you are ready to select methods for achieving your needs assessment objectives. To begin answering your questions and to avoid duplicating efforts of other organizations, review existing sources of data. There are numerous sources of data in your community that may be able to answer some of your needs assessment questions, (e.g., what is the ethnic breakdown of my school’s population?)

Once you have gathered all the existing data sources, then you are ready to choose from methods for obtaining new needs assessment data, surveys, focus groups, nominal group process, key informant interviews, and resource mapping. Each of these five methods are summarized and discussed in detail in the latter parts of this chapter.

Gathering Existing Data
Data for your needs assessment may come from a variety of community sources. Whether or not existing information sources detail the specific health needs in any particular school, existing sources may help provide a useful context for your needs assessment. The scope of different data sources may range from limited (e.g., mental health needs of adolescents in your community) to comprehensive (e.g., previous community-wide child health needs assessments). You should be able to combine existing sources to give you an increasingly clearer picture of student health. Because it would be a waste of resources and time to answer questions that have recently been answered by others, we suggest several sources of existing data you should explore before gathering new data. However, be aware that existing resources may have some limitations if they haven’t included data on children similar to your population, or your school specifically.

Compiling existing data sources is an appropriate method for starting a needs assessment. Often communities will have a great deal of information that simply needs to be gathered to help answer your questions. If existing data only answers part of your questions, then you could supplement this method with other needs assessment methods described later.

What information is already available?
The following is a list of sources that might provide you with necessary information:

Census Data - you may obtain census data by looking in the "General Social and Economic Characteristics" volume for your state in the Census of Population. You may also want to check the relevant web page, http://www.census.gov/.

Vital Statistics - including county birth and death certificates can be used to document the reasons for mortality, morbidity, and the birth rate for a specific population. These statistics can be obtained from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) or from your state health department. NCHS can be reached at http://www.cdc.gov/nchswww/index.htm.

School District Offices - might be able to provide information on rates of dropout, truancy, suspensions, probation, and grades repeated, as well as school nurse records, which often include immunization status. They may also be able to supply you with names of Head Start directors familiar with your community, who can help you identify community contacts, resources, and needs.
The Chamber of Commerce - may have useful demographic data from your community, including new population and economic shifts. Your group can also request and/or pay to have additional questions added to the community surveys conducted by the Chamber on a periodic basis.

Legislative Resources - may help you understand the most prominent health needs of students. You may look on your state's legislative web page to learn who sits on committees of child and adolescent health. The institution you work with, or the professional organization you belong to, may have one person who is responsible for digesting and summarizing legislative issues relevant to your field. You can also ask to be introduced to specific legislative staff who might be able to share information with you regarding the community in which you want to establish a SBHC.

Local Journals and Newspapers - may offer in-depth descriptions of your community's health problems, potential solutions, or at least the names of relevant persons who can be contacted for additional information.

Student Survey Data - may be available at several different levels. For instance, the Center for Disease Control and Health Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) provides national data regarding adolescent risk behaviors. The survey may be conducted in your vicinity, thus offering local statistics as well. Other agencies in your area may conduct surveys regarding drug use, mental health, or other specific issues. School principals will likely be a good source for determining what data already exists.

Other Important Data Resources -

Educational Resources
- School principals, teachers, and staff
- Local, county, state, and federal departments of education
- Libraries
- Local colleges and universities

Health Resources
- Local physical and mental health clinics and health programs
- National and state SBHC groups, including: The National Assembly with the affiliate state organizations (which can be contacted by phone at 1-888-286-8727, Making the Grade (a SBHC organization which can be found at http://www.gwu.edu/-mtg/); and Advocates for Youth (another knowledgeable SBHC organization, which can be found at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org, or at 202-347-5700)
- Medical and other professional societies, [e.g., American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American School Health Association (ASHA)]

Community Resources
- Community action agencies (health and welfare councils, youth advocacy groups)
- Community organizations (Parent - Teacher Associations, League of Women Voters, community development boards)
- Major employers
- Nonprofits and umbrella organizations, (e.g., United Way, La Raza, League of United Latin American Citizens, Junior League, Rotary clubs)
- Youth-serving agencies,( e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy/Girl Scouts, Campfire
gamers, YMCAs, YWCAs, community centers, after-school daycare agencies)

- Religious organizations including Catholic Social Services, Salvation Army, Lutheran Social Services, Council of Jewish Women, Council of Churches; as well as local parishes, synagogues, or mosques

**Governmental Resources**

- Local, county, state, and federal departments of health, probation, and social services, [e.g., Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF)], foster care, departments of social services or public welfare, the Human Resources Administration, and the Children's Bureau. Many of these sources can be accessed through web sites.
- City and regional planning agencies

Once you have identified sources of existing data, work hard to obtain them, either from a web-page, library, or from specific individuals or organizations. Summarize the information so that it is useful for you. Once you have exhausted existing data sources to answer all the specific questions you listed in Worksheet 3.1, you can then consider one or more of the following needs assessment methods to help answer any remaining questions.

Surveys, focus groups, nominal group process, key informant interviews, and resource mapping are all different methods for gathering information. We encourage you to use a minimum of two data collection approaches summarized below in order to compensate for limitations inherent in any one method. We also recommend that you engage a number of community members in collecting the needs assessment information to further ownership of the problem or issue you are trying to address.
Collecting New Data

Summary Of Needs Assessment Methods

**Surveys** can be either a standardized survey or a local survey that you might develop yourself. If you cannot find an instrument which has already been developed to suit your community, we suggest you modify an existing tool, or as a last resort, construct your own survey. A survey you construct on your own may not have as good reliability and validity as a standardized instrument, but may better suit your needs. A number of school surveys have been developed in the field of SBHCs. We suggest a number of surveys you may use in Table 3.1 (p. 97), and provide examples of surveys you can use or adapt in Appendices C and D. You may also call the Office of School Health at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, 1-800-669-9954, which acts as a clearinghouse for such materials.

**Focus Groups** are similar to a group discussion or group interview. With this method you gather 6-10 community members who share a similar background, and ask them to discuss certain topics. For example, focus groups may be conducted with parents of students, male students, female students, and school staff. This method will provide a lot of interesting data, which may give you clues about the context of the issues you are trying to resolve, and give you an idea of the degree to which there is consensus or disagreement regarding topics you raise as part of the discussion.

**Nominal Group Process** involves gathering 6-10 people and asking them an open-ended question, (e.g., how do you think we might be able to increase the rate of immunizations in this community?) Rather than brainstorming, which may be intimidating...
for some people, the nominal group process involves each person writing down his or her ideas, then sharing each of these ideas briefly in round-robin fashion, while the facilitator lists the ideas on a flipchart. Then all the ideas are discussed, clarified, and combined as appropriate. Finally, each person ranks the ideas and the rankings for each idea are tallied. Top ideas are further discussed and ranked again, if necessary. Implementation phases can be planned once the priorities are established.

**Key Informant Interviews** are interviews that utilize key formal and informal leaders in the community, and are a method of quickly gathering an overview of available community resources and problems. Interviewing these people may be a good way to introduce SBHC services into the community because these key informants can subsequently encourage others in the community to trust and support the development of school services.

**Resource Mapping** is a graphic way of identifying organizations and groups in your community that are serving students. It is often called a strength or assets assessment and helps to delineate potential resources you may have available to meet the gaps you identify. The mapping process also helps to visualize what service gaps exist in your community, for example, few specific adolescent mental health services.