

North Carolina Assessment Initiative

Background

Assessment is the systematic collection, assembly, analysis, and dissemination of information about the health of a community, and is one of the core functions of public health. To strengthen the nation's assessment capabilities, CDC began the **Assessment Initiative (AI)** in 1992 in partnership with various state health departments. The AI supported the development of innovative systems and methods that improve access to health data and the way data are used to inform and guide leaders involved in planning, developing, and evaluating policies and interventions to improve the health of communities. The AI supports two focus areas:

Community health assessment practices: States develop and implement tools, strategies, and approaches to improve assessment practices at local public health agencies.

Data dissemination systems: States implement interactive Web-based data query systems for user-friendly analysis and dissemination of public health data.

North Carolina — Community Health Assessment Practices

North Carolina is one of the nine states currently receiving 5-year federal funding since 2007. The North Carolina Community Health Assessment Initiative (NC-CHAI) aims to strengthen assessment capacity through the following goals:

Goal 1: Continue to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the assessment innovations established and develop strategies for sustainability.

North Carolina's community health assessment (CHA) model aimed to establish a collaborative process that engaged community stakeholders to jointly design, implement, and analyze the findings of a comprehensive assessment. Data were collected through surveys, key informant interviews, listening groups, the NC State Center for Health Statistics, and other secondary local data sources. CHAs were conducted collaboratively by local health departments and local coalitions, primarily Healthy Carolinians partnerships, which are public-private partnerships representing health and human service agencies and other community stakeholders. Priorities were then collectively determined based on findings and alignment with North Carolina's 2010 and new 2020 health objectives. NC-CHAI has also developed and disseminated the North Carolina Community Assessment Guidebook, which provides communities with a systematic way of engaging residents in assessing problems and strategizing solutions.

A steering committee was established in 2008 to support and evaluate North Carolina's CHA process. Members are from the Governor's Task Force for Healthy Carolinians and meet regularly with external and internal community partners.

Goal 2: Promote, monitor, and evaluate the CHA Integration System that links assessment findings to state public health program and policy development.

The CHA Integration System links CHA findings with state public health programs, local health departments, local community partnerships, and researchers. This query system allows users to search multiple indicators such as priorities, strategies, and interventions; access county community health assessment documents; and ask questions through a discussion forum. Initiative staff will promote the usage of the CHA Integration System to community stakeholders, ensure the system reflects current and accurate community health assessment findings and priorities, and evaluate the system for effectiveness and ease of use.

Goal 3: Provide and evaluate community health assessment training and technical assistance for North Carolina's public health workforce.

CHA trainings are being held throughout the year through in-person training sessions and online webinars. To date, over 400 local health department staff, community partners, and Healthy Carolinians members have been trained. Stakeholders are surveyed periodically to assess training gaps and gauge whether trainings offered were beneficial. The NC-CHAI epidemiologist and trainer provide technical assistance to counties on data-related issues and will conduct in-person training sessions as funds allow.

Goal 4: Enhance and evaluate North Carolina's Comprehensive Assessment for Tracking Community Health (NC-CATCH) system.

The North Carolina Comprehensive Assessment for Tracking Community Health (NC-CATCH) system was created as a tool to facilitate collection, analysis, and presentation of secondary data by local health professionals conducting their community health assessments. NC-CATCH houses a collection of health and demographic datasets that have been put into an easily accessible, Web-based data warehouse. It also allows authorized users to create unique queries to combine different levels of data, make graphs and charts, and export data to spreadsheets. Staff are currently revising the system to be part of the Indicator Based Information System (IBIS) Community of Practice.

On the Horizon

NC-CHAI's activities have provided new tools, resources, and on-line trainings to aid counties in the CHA process. North Carolina's Guidebook has been recognized and resides on the Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health's County Health Rankings and Association for Community Health Improvement website as a national example. States such as Michigan and Massachusetts have inquired about adapting the Guidebook to meet their needs. Requests for the using and adapting the Guidebook also include the new Internal Revenue Service's Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) requirements for not-for-profit hospitals.

NC-CHAI staff are currently identifying resources within the Division of Public Health to sustain ongoing needs for CHA staff, the CHA Integration System, and the evaluation of CHA. They are also developing funding proposals for appropriations from the North Carolina General Assembly; however, obtaining funding may be difficult because of the state budget crisis.

Web Resources

NC Community Assessment Guidebook, recently revised to provide updated tools and resources for local communities: http://www.healthycarolinians.org/library/pdf/CHA_Guide_Book1-2011.pdf

CHA Integration System Database allows users to search by multiple indicators (County, Year, Objective): <http://www.healthycarolinians.org/assessment/healthobjectives.aspx>

NC State Center for Health Statistics: <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/data/county.cfm>