

Reaching People with Disabilities through Healthy Communities

Phase 2 – Assessment and Training

Using the Community Inclusion Index (CHII)

[Karma Harris] In thinking about the other aspect of this phase, the Assessment phase, the second important activity is conducting a community health assessment. And anytime you do any type of healthy community project, you want to do a community health assessment of some sort.

So, community health assessment is an important step in this inclusive Healthy Communities model because it really provides us with a snapshot of a community's assets and barriers to healthy living. So it gives community coalitions baseline data, it identifies any local asset to build upon, or existing gaps that need to be addressed. And it really helps the community coalitions, and the Community Coaches began to see where they should start investing their resources and setting their priorities for healthy living as they move forward in the project process. So, a community health assessment should really examine all the sectors within a community, so that coalitions can really then identify and determine where in which sectors, they should initiate some of these improvements.

And so, while there are several different community health assessment tools that can be used for Healthy Communities projects, the one that we chose to use for this project is one that is called the Community Health Inclusion Index, or the CHII for short. We chose the CHII because it is one of a few tools out there that intentionally uses a disability inclusion lens for assessing Healthy Living strategies, such as healthy eating and physical activity within five different community sectors.

And so, the CHII really looked at the community-at-large sector, community institutions and organizations, schools, worksites, and healthcare. And it really kind of had a two-part component where you looked at organizations and you assessed them via a survey and then you also were able to actually assess the environment that the organizations had: that built environment.

So, to give our listeners an example of a type of inclusive question that might be asked in an inclusive community health assessment, like the CHII, I like to use the example of a fitness center. So when you are looking at a fitness center, and you're considering that fitness center for persons who might have a mobility limitation of some sort, it's important to consider proper flow and spacing of exercise equipment in the gym setting, so that people who might use an assistive device of some sort can navigate the exercise area appropriately.

And another example using the same gym fitness-type setting, having accessible exercise equipment available allows a person with a mobility limitation, or any other type of disability, to access the gym and the equipment and to participate in exercise. And so these are the types of questions that inclusive community health assessments like the CHII might include when you're assessing parts of your community, such as in this case a local gym.

And so, our NCHPAD project partners really created this tool, the Community Health Inclusion Index, and they shared the CHII with us as a part of this project and provided training to all of us on how to do that. And so Angela, in thinking about back to the community health assessment process, can you give us some examples about how the CHII was conducted in the Oregon communities and specifically

really talk to us, too, about the role that you might have played as a State Expert Advisor for the two Oregon communities as they implemented their requirement of completing the assessment.

[Angela Weaver] Sure. As the State Expert, I provided technical assistance and support with completing the required component. So, I helped the Community Coaches and coalitions, you know, understand the tool, the assessment tool. And I also served as a resource for the disability inclusion and accessibility components of the tool. And I did this primarily through regular scheduled phone calls with the teams Community Coaches and discussed the importance of conducting the assessments and ensuring that they crossed all sectors or the different sites, you know, like you mentioned in order to give a comprehensive look at their community.

And during those calls we also discussed, and we shared ideas about how to work successfully with their coalition and sharing with them the importance of the CHII tool and especially in how the CHII specifically focuses on disability inclusion and how that does make it a unique tool. And because it's a unique tool, it may be a tool that their healthy communities coalitions aren't familiar with, and so, really giving them examples of how it's beneficial to have that disability inclusion lens.

And then to talk a little bit about what the process both communities took. You know one of the things that's beautiful about this project and really beneficial is that it is community-driven. Both communities really work independently with their local coalitions to determine the community sectors that they wanted to assess. And the sites that they ended up assessing ended up really reflecting the priorities of the people who made up the coalition.

For example, in Umatilla County, their coalition was made up of primarily healthcare representatives and community members that experienced disabilities, and city officials, as well as some other members, and what they ended up focusing on were sites that were related primarily to healthcare, as well as sites that were in and around the city of Pendleton. And for Benton County, their coalition was made up of city officials and again community members that experienced disabilities, as well as Oregon State University students. The sites that they assessed were sort of more general recreation and leisure sites in and around the city of Corvallis, as well as some overall city planning within downtown Corvallis.

[Karma Harris] So in thinking about that, can you say maybe a few more words about what the health assessment process and the tool that we used ultimately provided to the communities?

[Angela Weaver] So, for example, in Umatilla County within the city of Pendleton, so what they found through their CHII assessment process in working specifically again with the city employees is they were able to learn about some gaps that their community had around both access to healthy foods and physical activity within their community. What they found was that with the city of Pendleton, where they assessed their main city park. So, they found a significant gap in how accessible the parks pathway is from the park's parking lot onto a paved walking trail that runs around the inside perimeter of the

entire park and then also up to a covered picnic area. And so, through this CHII process, they found that from the parking lot to get to the paved trail, there was no pavement, it was rocks and then grass.

And so, someone that uses a mobility device, that was not accessible to them or at least easily accessible to them to get to the path to then enjoy that trail although through the park and then also the covered picnic area. And then they also discovered in working with the city of Pendleton and looking at their city-sponsored events like their annual concerts in the park, their local swimming pool, and things where the city provided refreshment or food, they found that there were not adequate healthy options or actually not many options at all that were healthy. Through using the CHII they were able to find that not only were there not healthy options, but they need to make sure that there are accessible healthy options at all of their city-sponsored events. So those were a couple of the gaps that they were able to identify and then work through to make adjustments.

[Karma Harris] I think those are great examples of kind of what we wanted to see and how the assessment process really contributes to those final changes that are in communities, and that are sustained over beyond the funding period. And really some of those changes that you just described wouldn't be here had we not done an inclusive community assessment, like using the CHII tool.