

FROM ASSESSMENT TO INVESTMENT

*New Data, Mapping and Reporting Resource for
Community Health Needs Assessments
Helps Shape Investments in Community Health*

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As part of their charitable mission, not-for-profit hospitals and health care systems are rooted in the work of nurturing and improving the health and well-being of those they serve, both inside the hospital setting and in the wider community. Such work requires understanding a host of interdependencies between people and the places in which they live, work and play that all come together to shape a healthy, human ecosystem.

Community health needs assessments serve a critical role in identifying those in greatest need in our communities and ensuring that health care and community benefit resources are used to maximize health improvement and address health care disparities. Yet, for many hospitals, especially those that are under-resourced, the process of conducting such assessments can be a daunting and expensive challenge.

To better assist with the community health needs assessment process, Kaiser Permanente, based in Oakland, Calif., has been active in developing new resources that provide open access to a wide range of data in order to better understand the health needs of the populations we serve and the assets within our communities. Nationally, we have collaborated with multiple organizations and experts spanning the health care, public health and community improvement sectors, including the Catholic Health Association and American Hospital Association, to develop a new online resource that places comprehensive, in-depth information about community health-related issues, needs and resources at the fingertips of hospital staff and community partners everywhere. The result of that collaboration

can be found at www.CHNA.org, a free web-based utility designed to facilitate assessment, mapping, reporting, acting on opportunities and tracking outcomes over time.

The CHNA platform, an integral part of a national resource called The Community Commons (www.communitycommons.org) was built to assist hospitals as well as other institutions — non-profit community-based organizations, state and local health departments, financial institutions, engaged citizens and other key stakeholders — in understanding the needs and assets of their communities. It offers comprehensive geographic information systems (GIS) mapping, analytic and reporting tools to facilitate the assessment

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of community health needs and assets critical to shaping and investing in the health and well-being of communities. The platform is entirely free to use, a gift for the common good, developed and operated in trust for the social and economic well-being of the nation. The platform is powered by the Institute for People, Place and Possibility (IP3, found at www.i-P3.org), a social and innovation venture, which has provided the expertise for designing and supporting the Community Commons resource.

The project evolved from ongoing discussions that followed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) public forum in July, 2011, “Best Practices for Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Strategy Development.” Conversations centered on how to enable organizations and communities with limited resources to better assess and address community health needs and the need to improve the ways by which hospitals, health departments and community-based organizations collaboratively identify, access and use public data and technology platforms to advance population health. These conversations informed the multi-partner design and implementation of what would later produce the new platform and tools.

The CHNA platform provides access to thousands of data points and sources and offers the capability to create automated and customized reports, tables, charts and maps. The tool can dramatically reduce the time and expense associated with traditional modes of collecting and analyzing data for community health needs assessment — allowing precious local resources to be allocated to local engagement, making sense of the wide array of data and implementing strategies that can have a positive impact on population and community health.

The national CHNA platform emerged from the wisdom and resources of its many partners and from the developmental work that Kaiser Permanente had concurrently begun with IP3 to create a web-based resource that would support our hospital facilities and their community partners. Now with both of these tools fully in place, the important work of shaping “healthy, human ecosystems” can shift from a time- and dollar-intensive focus on finding data and developing reports to

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the more important work of partnership engagement and collaborative investment.

Kaiser Permanente is currently using the CHNA platform to inform work across our 36 hospitals and the communities we serve, as well as in our non-hospital regions that have elected to undertake the process. We are using the data and mapping tools to identify areas of highest need and prospective action. With the power of that information, we are better equipped to work with our community partners to implement actions that thoughtfully and directly address the true health needs of those we exist to serve.

The free national platform found at www.CHNA.org will continue to evolve, based on the input and needs of communities and organization using it. Opportunities include developing a national peer learning network where community leaders can share their experiences on what works and learn about policies and investment strategies that are measurably improving health. We invite you to join us in using this non-proprietary resource and mission for the common good — vital to the health and well-being of the people and communities we all serve, and the long-term vitality of our great nation.

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