

PARTNERING WITH LOCAL NEWS MEDIA TO INCREASE CHNA ENGAGEMENT

Community benefit activities can and should reflect the greater good that Catholic health care is doing in our communities. Telling the story about community benefit in the local media should be a priority during the Community Health Needs Assessment process.



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The Affordable Care Act requires tax-exempt hospitals to gauge health needs in the communities they serve, then put together and implement a plan for addressing them. This CHNA process then repeats every three years. Reporters, editors and hosts from community newspapers, television and radio stations can play an important role in helping not only to inform the

community that your CHNA is underway, but also to encourage residents to participate and provide valuable input.

For those of you responsible for planning your ministry's CHNA, consider engaging your local media early in the process, and then update them frequently on your progress.

When pitching any story to a reporter or editor, it's important to make a sound case about how the story would interest their audience. The CHNA process may not seem like an especially newsworthy endeavor unless you consider — and explain — how it works and who is involved.

There are stories to tell about gathering primary and secondary data on health factors affecting the community. Is there a high rate of asthma among local schoolchildren? Is the number of adults with diabetes indicating that poor nutrition and an overall unhealthy lifestyle is a serious problem? Has the opioid epidemic surfaced in — or ravaged — the community?

The CHNA process frequently represents an unusual level of collaboration among hospitals and other area stakeholders in order to collect the necessary data. Public health and civic leaders

serve on steering committees, community focus groups and listening sessions meet, all to identify and concentrate on health care issues that by definition are important community matters. That means a CHNA offers multiple opportunities along the way to tell a positive story with important local impact.

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

In cities with more than one hospital, aggressive marketing campaigns featuring dueling billboards claiming “top-rated care” can leave the impression that the community's hospitals compete more than they collaborate. But because CHNA data gathering is so extensive, most hospitals work with local peers to collect the community information they each need, although they file their forms separately.

A CHNA conducted by two or more competing hospitals is worth highlighting. Once all the organizations leading the process are identified and they have agreed on a plan, notify the media:

- Send out a press release that includes the partners' logos across the top.

- Contact the newspaper and ask that the editorial board meet with CHNA coalition members.

- Call local news/talk radio stations and ask if they would like to have a representative from each hospital come into the studio during drive time, the important morning and evening hours when commuters swell the number of listeners.

- Reach out to local TV stations and request an appearance on one of the upcoming early-morning or midday interview segments for hospital representatives to talk about their collaboration. Note that stations schedule interviews far in advance.

These interview opportunities help set the tone that the CHNA coalition is serious about engaging residents in the process and that the overall health of the community is a priority that supersedes individual business interests.

KEEP THEM IN THE LOOP

Once the initial round of interviews is complete, it's important to periodically check back in with the local media contacts who have expressed interest in the process.

Also, because reporters and editors pay attention to Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, consider creating accounts for the CHNA coalition to give it a distinct social media presence. Pick a relevant name and logo, make sure your media contacts know about the accounts and encourage them to follow along. Be sure to keep your social media accounts active — for example, post regularly about the progress of your research, upcoming meetings and new partners in order to help keep the CHNA top of mind.

Two milestones worthy of a direct request for media coverage are the dissemination of a communitywide survey and public meetings.

When a survey is posted online and available in printed form in places such as public libraries, ask your media contacts to help spread the word. They should understand how important community feedback is to the process and be inclined to run a short article or give the survey a quick mention on the air.

If the coalition is planning larger community engagement sessions, consider asking a well-known TV or radio personality to emcee the event. This is another opportunity to ask the media for help promoting the event(s) to increase community participation. For smaller focus groups, consider inviting the media to sit in and observe from behind the one-way glass. Allowing them

to observe can help them better understand the process.

It's also important to provide coalition members and community groups with written articles, pictures and blog posts that they can use in their own communications — neighborhood as-

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sociation newsletters, e-newsletters from civic clubs and church bulletins, for example. These are good channels for broadening community awareness about the CHNA survey and upcoming meetings. They are also another way to reach members of the media, as they, too, belong to local clubs, attend church and are neighbors.

SHARING RESULTS

Once the CHNA process moves from the research phase into drafting the document and companion implementation plan, it's time to start planning for a press conference with coalition members to announce the results. Members of the local media who have been following the CHNA process from the beginning will be inclined to cover the press conference, and they also are more likely to give coverage greater prominence in their publications and broadcasts.

For the press conference, consider holding it in a neutral site in the community and invite all the stakeholders who participated in developing the CHNA. Arranging for the larger group to gather in a public place, as opposed to only steering committee members

in a boardroom, adds excitement to the announcement and provides a visual element that underscores the community's involvement.

Announcing the results of the CHNA doesn't necessarily have to be a press conference in the traditional sense. The document could be shared at a long-standing event in the community, such as a civic group's annual awards dinner or mayor's prayer breakfast. In those situations, make sure that key members of the coalition are available to answer reporters' questions immediately following the event.

Also, announcing the CHNA results doesn't have to be limited to one event. You can create a speakers' bureau plan where members of the steering committee make the rounds at local civic club breakfast and lunch meetings. Tweeting and posting about those presentations and providing new content for newsletters and emails that community organizations send out is another way to keep the CHNA findings in the news.

THE STORY NEVER ENDS

The CHNA process provides local reporters and editors with an opportunity to tell a deeper story that involves thoughtful collaboration and community involvement around efforts to improve what's most important to each and every one of us — our health and well-being. Because the programs identified in the CHNA implementation plan address ongoing health needs, there should be ample opportunities to follow up with local media and tell the story of how the coalition is progressing and making a positive difference in the community. And because CHNAs are required every three years, it's a story that keeps on giving.

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