

Needs Assessments

Needs assessments are implemented prior to taking action or designing a program as they provide information about the extent of the health problem(s). Furthermore, they describe the current situation in the community as you simultaneously identify current assets and existing gaps. Needs assessments serve as a first step to having a comprehensive understanding of a community and its health status.

Please note: This section will instruct you on *writing the results* of a needs assessment, not *conducting* a needs assessment.

Components:

- **Data.** You should clearly describe how, where, and when you collected the data on which the assessment is based. Be sure to identify the sources of data. Data presented in a needs assessment may include both basic demographic information of the community as well as the prevalence of the health outcome. For sources of data, it may be beneficial to consult local, state, or national databases depending on your particular outcome or demographic information of interest. Use tables and figures if appropriate to present the data.
- **Current Assets.** While the primary objective of a needs assessment is to identify gaps of service in the community, it is also important to identify and clearly describe current assets within the community. For example, a community may pride itself on its abundance of parks or strong civil society (many non-governmental organizations active in local governance issues). These assets should be examined and viewed as opportunistic for the community rather than overlooked in light of the gaps.
- **Current Gaps.** Gaps in services should also be clearly identified, referring to the data that has revealed these gaps. These gaps may vary depending on the health outcome, but generally encompass structural barriers or a lack of services. For example, a community may exist in a food desert or may not have adequate public transportation. In addition to nonexistent services, services that are deficient should also be mentioned. For example, a community may have a health center but it may be over-capacity and cannot accommodate additional patients.

Overall, it is important to consider all determinants of health when conducting and subsequently writing a needs assessment. The individual, community, institutional, and structural levels all contribute to health outcomes and should be examined and discussed.

For more information, visit the following resources:

- [Comprehensive Needs Assessments – Office of Migrant Education](#)
- [Principles to Consider for the Implementation of a Community Health Needs Assessment - George Washington University](#)