

Needs Assessment

A needs assessment is a snapshot of a practice to describe its current state, and to extrapolate how what is currently going on may affect health services needs of the future.

Definition of Needs Assessment

“Needs assessments ... are a deliberate activity undertaken to describe the needs of current and potential patients within the practice ... needs assessment information is used to identify opportunities to improve the health of patients and/or community based on the needs that are judged to be most urgent and most amenable to primary care, team-based intervention” (Quality Improvement and Innovation Partnership, 2009, p.3).

The first step in conducting a needs assessment is:

1) Formulate a specific question.

Take care to formulate your questions carefully as it will determine the scope of your assessment (Quality Improvement and Innovation Partnership, 2009).

2) Seek out sources of information that can provide answers.

Some sources of information you may want to consider include:

- Results from other organizational level planning documents such as the external environmental scan and dialogue with stakeholders.
- Demographics of the population you serve from census data.
- Health status, health services, prevalence rates of health problems from national databases such as Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and Statistics Canada.
- Patterns in health services use from records kept by your organization.
- Research literature.



- Talking to stakeholders including: all members of the interprofessional care team, the administration of your organization, representatives from community service agencies, patients, and funders.

3) Keep the following information collection guidelines in mind when considering what sources of information to include and what data to record.

Information collected for the needs assessment should:

- Test assumptions or beliefs that health care providers hold about community needs.
- Generate new knowledge, i.e. go beyond what is already known.
- Impact the practice of multiple disciplines.
- Be of adequate depth to provide direction for determining health care priorities (Quality Improvement and Innovation Partnership, 2009).

You will want to limit the scope of the needs assessment to something that is manageable for your team, and focus on data that will allow your team to track priority issues. Where possible build on information that is already being collected by your organization or others (CNA, 2006).

For more information about how to perform needs assessments, see the resources listed below.

Conducting Needs Assessments

Quality Improvement and Innovation Partnership (2009). Needs Assessment Resource Guide for Family Health Teams. Retrieved from:

<http://www.qiip.ca>

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence – Health needs assessment: A practical guide. Retrieved from:

http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutnice/whoweare/aboutthehda/hdapublications/health_needs_assessment_a_practical_guide.jsp

Murray, S.A., & Wilkinson, J.R. (1998). Assessment in primary care: Practical issues and possible approaches. *BMJ*, 316, 1524-1528.

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/316/7143/1524>



Loyola University Chicago, Centre for Urban Research and Learning and the Department of Psychology, 2000. A community needs assessment guide: A brief guide on how to conduct a needs assessment. Retrieved from:

http://www.luc.edu/curl/pdfs/A_Community_Needs_Assessment_Guide_.pdf

