

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

HISTORY OF THE PROCESS

In 1996 local health care providers and community leaders in Henderson County began an on-going dialogue about the challenges facing the community's health care delivery system. It was becoming apparent that the pressures of reform including changes in Medicaid, AFDC, and reimbursement rates for rural hospitals were beginning to strain the community's limited resources. Local leaders responded by forming a Community Health Council to serve as a mechanism for evaluating the health status of the community and pooling resources to address shared problems. The Health Council conducted a comprehensive assessment of the health status of Henderson County residents and developed a strategy to address the needs identified.

COMMUNITY DIAGNOSIS

The "Community Diagnosis" process developed by the Tennessee Department of Health was the basis for the assessment. Community Diagnosis is a data-driven assessment process which helps communities identify and prioritize health problems.

Information regarding the community's health status, in addition to data available from the State, was collected and analyzed. Data from a behavioral risk factor survey conducted by the University of Tennessee was also reviewed. Secondary data available from the Department of Health and other sources were then studied in order to focus discussion. Once a comprehensive list of problems had been compiled, the problems were prioritized based on size, seriousness, and effectiveness of interventions. Using this approach a Community Health Problems List was developed. Once this list had been compiled, work groups were developed to begin developing specific goals and designing appropriate interventions.

"Health Departments across the county have not developed good assessment capabilities, but we must concentrate on this function if we are to enter the 21st century with the data and system to recognize health problems as well as resolve them."

***Fredia Wadley, Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Health
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