

Raising the Bar on Your CHNAs and Implementation Strategies

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By Debra Thompson, President, Strategy Solutions
and Bruce Lockwood, Director, Community Health Division, Professional Research Consultants

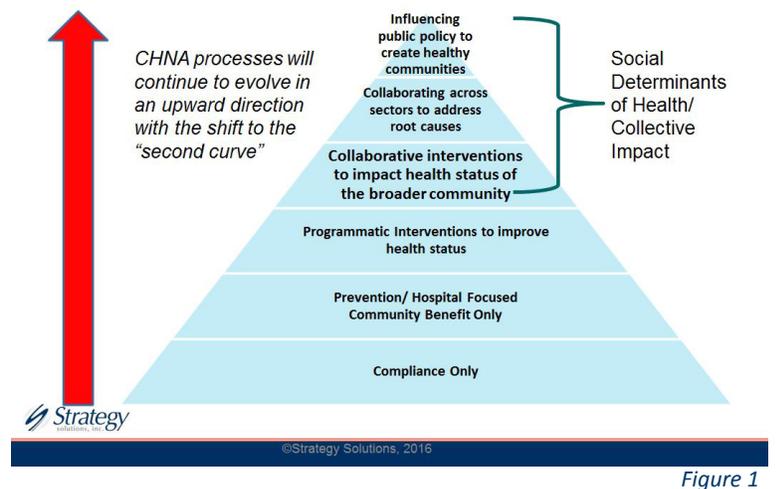
Having the right resources in place to support your Community Health Needs Assessment process, including partnering with the right consultants for research and implementation planning, is critical to having a successful (i.e., sustainable and impactful) engagement. Before you embark on your next CHNA — whether you are doing it yourself, working collaboratively, or outsourcing — you should ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does our process reflect best practices?
2. Are we collaborating with other sectors to collect data on and address the social determinants of health (see Figure 1)?
3. Does our process include benchmarking and alignment with recognized disease prevention and health promotion goals?
4. Do we have systems in place to measure outcomes and the impact of our efforts and to evaluate results?
5. Are we aware of the policy changes that impact (or will impact) CHNAs?
6. Do we know how our CHNA and implementation strategies will affect our future reimbursement?
7. Does our CHNA staff/consultant have experience and provide guidance on the above topics as part of the CHNA engagement?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” you should perhaps rethink your approach. Sadly, after the IRS mandate, there were untold numbers of consultants (accounting, economic development, and other consulting firms) who “jumped in the game” and assured hospitals that “we can do that.”

Some consultants preyed upon profitable hospitals stating that they knew best how to protect their non-profit tax status. Some hospitals ended up with a document that outlined a number of priorities that were good ideas, that they weren’t quite sure what to do with. Some turned to local universities, expecting expert assistance, only to be disappointed.

Community Health Improvement Evolution



While most anyone who can do an Internet search can collect and compile public information on health status indicators and publish a document that “looks nice” and “checks the boxes,” it requires experience and skill to understand how a healthcare or public health system works and how the data should be collected and used for decision-making to support population health management and create healthier communities. The following are a few suggestions to ensure that you have the right resources to navigate the transformation to accountable care:

1. **Don’t be “penny wise and pound foolish.”** While everyone is conscious to stay within a budget, it is important to invest (periodically, at the very least) in solid “real time” primary data (i.e., a scientifically collected, population-based survey) that is representative of your service area. While this is often seen as a “big ticket item” (and many forego it for that reason), only primary data offers actionable, timely information that reflects your specific community, something that can prove indispensable to your community health improvement efforts. And it can more than pay for itself if leveraged to gain grant funding.

(continued on page 2)

2. **Consider another wise investment to help you “raise the bar”** (even if you have the internal capacity to conduct and manage your CHNA). Hiring a consultant to train your staff on new skills, conduct leadership education, and/or help you evaluate your outcomes and impact can pay dividends by helping you build new capabilities.
3. **Ask consultants about their knowledge of best practices and their CHNA experience before the IRS regulations were passed.** Determine a consultant’s past commitment to and knowledge of CHNAs, as well as their breadth and depth of experience conducting CHNAs for hospitals and collaboratives. If they “jumped on the bandwagon” in 2013, they might not fully understand the IRS guidelines, might not have appropriate knowledge of best practices, and/or might focus only on the compliance components and miss out on the real opportunities for population health management that CHNAs can offer.
4. **Assess knowledge of, experience with and commitment to cross-sector and/or multi-hospital collaboration in communities.** Facilitating collaboration among competing entities is an art; find someone with experience, especially if you have a “Tower of Babel” problem in your community. Often, different sectors in communities want the same thing, but have difficulty working together because they “speak a different language.” Identifying researchers and facilitators with cross-sector collaboration skills, who understand how the healthcare and public health industries are changing and integrating to create healthy communities, is often a critical factor for success.
5. **Identify resources that understand and can support “emerging strategy.”** The hockey great Wayne Gretzky is often quoted as a good strategist because he “skated to where the puck was going to be.” Regardless of who is conducting your CHNA, you should have someone on your staff or consulting team who is well-versed in population health management, health policy and emerging trends.
6. **Establish a meaningful evaluation process for your CHNA, including building outcomes and impact tracking into your implementation strategy (and automate indicators).** The only outcome measure on many hospitals’ implementation strategies is “the number of people that participate.” This is an output, NOT an outcome. Additionally, you don’t need to wait for a Healthcare Information Exchange to analyze data from different sources; you need to find the right IT guy (or gal) to help you. Creating the systems to track and report the data should be included as part of your action plan, as they require time and investment.
7. **Call us if you need help!** PRC and Strategy Solutions have been conducting CHNAs for over 20 years and have the knowledge and skills to support your needs.

As the healthcare industry continues to evolve, the emphasis on population health management will only increase for hospitals, and this will more and more become the measure of a hospital’s success or failure. Finding the right partners who can help you take your CHNA and Implementation Strategy planning to the next level is the first step.

Debra Thompson
 President
 Strategy Solutions, Inc.
 debbie@getstrategy.com

Bruce Lockwood
 Director, Community Health Division
 Professional Research Consultants, Inc. (PRC)
 Bruce@PRCCustomResearch.com



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