

MIDDLESEX HEALTH

Middlesex Hospital Community Health Needs Assessment Implementation Strategy

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Many thanks to the following contributors for their participation in the community health needs assessment implementation strategy planning team and community conversation event:

- Reverend Robyn Anderson, MS, LPC, LMFT, LADC, Executive Director, Ministerial Health Fellowship
- Kevin Elak, MPH, RS/REHS, CP-FS, Director of Health, City of Middletown Department of Health
- Amber Kapoor, MPH, Health Education, Grants, and Survivorship Coordinator, Middlesex Health Cancer Center
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Additional thanks to those who gave their time and expertise to participate in the community conversation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Middlesex Health completed its most recent community health needs assessment (CHNA) in 2022. Per IRS Tax Code 501(r)(3), in addition to completing an adopting CHNAs every three years, not-for-profit hospitals must develop a CHNA Implementation Strategy, which must also be adopted by their governing bodies. A CHNA Implementation Strategy is a written plan that describes how a hospital intends to address the significant health and health-related needs identified in its community health needs assessment. What differentiates the most recent CHNA and CHNA Implementation Strategy cycle from past years is the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 impacted every aspect of life, health and well-being and caused significant personal and societal loss, which has had lasting effects on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals. The pandemic has taken a disproportionate toll on people of color and other marginalized groups, illuminating longstanding and historic societal inequities.

To assist Middlesex Health in prioritizing the significant health and health-related needs identified in its 2022 community health needs assessment, a facilitated community conversation was held. Participants prioritized top health issues within the context of social influencers of health, the impact of COVID-19, and health disparities and discussed community-based strategies. Middlesex Health is grateful to the community members and partners who participated in the CHNA community conversation and prioritization / strategy exercises, the results of which served as a guide for Middlesex Health's selection of priority areas for its CHNA Implementation Strategy. As a result of the the prioritization process, Middlesex Health will focus on the following four areas: 1) **Mental Health – All Ages**; 2) **Substance Use Issues**; 3) **Healthy Aging**; 4) **Maternal Child Health**; and 5) **Chronic Diseases**, with social determinants of health, health equity and the impacts of COVID-19 as essential components for each health area. Middlesex Health looks forward to continuing and expanding its community health partnerships in these key areas, where together, we can continue to meaningfully improve the health, well-being and quality of life for all community members.

This Implementation Strategy report outlines the process by which Middlesex Health has identified the most pressing health and health-related needs of the communities we serve and the priority areas Middlesex Health plans to address through goals, strategies and partnership. Foundational to this work is use of a data-driven and collaborative practice approach for improving community health, quality of life and advancing health equity.

Middlesex Health is grateful to its community partners and the community members who continue to work alongside us on initiatives that promote health and well-being and address the drivers that influence health status. It is through community engagement and collaboration that the most meaningful and impactful transformational changes can happen. Middlesex Health looks forward to continuing / expanding its partnerships that advance our shared goals and vision for a healthy and equitable community.

BACKGROUND

ABOUT MIDDLESEX HEALTH AND MIDDLESEX HOSPITAL

Middlesex Health is a comprehensive network of services provided in conjunction with hospital services. Middlesex Hospital proper, founded in 1904, is an independent, not-for-profit, acute-care community hospital located in Middletown, Connecticut. The hospital is licensed for 275 beds and 22 bassinets, and Middlesex Health serves a total population of more than 250,000 people. Middlesex Health employs over 3,400 people and has 378 active medical staff, 79 courtesy medical staff and 168 allied health professionals on its medical staff. Services provided include inpatient care and emergency services and extensive outpatient care, including diagnostic, physical rehabilitation (5 locations), behavioral health, disease management, radiology, laboratory, hospice / palliative care, cancer care (2 locations), care at home, wound and ostomy care, surgical services, paramedics services, medical specialists, an autism center, urgent care (3 locations), and a network of primary care offices (15 sites). Middlesex Health continues to fully support its Family Medicine Residency Program (in existence for more than 40 years) and Radiology School that operates on the hospital campus. In addition to its emergency department located in Middletown, Middlesex Health operates two satellite medical centers in Westbrook and Marlborough that have fully accredited, stand-alone emergency departments.

Middlesex Hospital was the first hospital in Connecticut to attain the nursing Magnet® designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center and currently holds five consecutive Magnet® designations. Middlesex Health became a member of the Mayo Clinic Care Network in October 2015. This relationship provides access to information, knowledge and expertise from Mayo Clinic's expert specialists.

MEASURING COMMUNITY HEALTH

The purpose of the community health needs assessment is to measure the health and health-related status of a defined geographic area through a systematic and comprehensive data collection process with input from persons representing the broad interests of the community. The goal of the CHNA is to use primary, secondary, quantitative and qualitative data sources of key demographic, health, well-being and social determinants of health indicators to document the unique characteristics and needs of the community served. Middlesex Health's most recently conducted CHNA can be accessed at <https://middlesexhealth.org/middlesex-and-the-community/serving-our-community/community-health-needs-assessment>.

ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY

As in the past, Middlesex Health continues to use its CHNA and Implementation Strategy to highlight social determinants of health and health equity. Health equity is the state where everyone has the opportunity to attain full health potential and no one is prevented from achieving this potential due to social position or socially defined circumstances. Advancing health equity ensures that every citizen has a

fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Addressing social determinants of health – the conditions that affect a wide range of health, functioning and quality of life outcomes – is necessary for reducing health disparities and ensuring that people have what they need to thrive and be successful.

Using a health equity lens to examine the findings of the community health needs assessment is an important guide for developing strategies for the prioritized health findings. Important questions in this process include: how do the systems that are in place perpetuate poor health at a community level? What are the social influencers and root causes behind these identified problems? What populations are disproportionately impacted and what are the reasons for these inequities? What upstream community-based and community-driven collaborative solutions can be developed, implemented and sustained?

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Using the results of the community health needs assessment, an implementation strategy is developed as a road map for meeting identified needs. Priority setting informs the formation of a CHNA Implementation Strategy where comprehensive action plans are developed to address identified community health and health-related needs. Using the results of a CHNA to develop an implementation strategy that addresses both the symptoms and underlying causes of persistent health problems is critical for improving community health, well-being and advancing health equity.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

A facilitated community conversation was held to review, prioritize, and discuss strategies and solutions for the significant health and health-related needs identified in Middlesex Health's 2022 community health needs assessment, thereby informing Middlesex Health's CHNA Implementation Strategy. A flier and invitation to the event was widely disseminated to an array of contacts in Middletown, Middlesex County and the periphery towns of Middlesex Health's primary service area to ensure participation by community leaders, stakeholders and community members with diverse backgrounds, perspectives and first-hand knowledge about their communities.

The community conversation format was selected as it provides a practical, purposeful and interactive approach for 1) exploring the causes and underlying issues behind specific health problems; 2) addressing concerns; 3) discussing desired future state; 4) designing strategies based on data and individual knowledge, perspective and experience; and, 5) serving as a foundation to encourage sustained engagement and to create opportunities for cooperative action.

Given COVID-19 concerns, the community conversation was held via a virtual format. A total of 65 people participated, representing various sectors including advocacy groups, alliances / coalitions, educational institutions, community based organizations, community residents, elected officials, faith-based organizations, health care organizations (including medical and behavioral), local health departments, municipal agencies, schools, social services, state agencies and youth and family services.

Prior to the prioritization and strategy exercises, an overview of Middlesex Health's 2022 CHNA was given, including background on the process; key demographic data; data limitations; definitions of health equity and social determinants of health; data on an array of health indicators; social and health disparity data, when available; and an overview of the top health needs identified in Middlesex Health's 2022 CHNA.

PRIORITIZATION

After the data presentation, Reverend Robyn Anderson, MS, LPC, LMFT, LADC, Executive Director, Ministerial Health Fellowship and Kevin Elak, MPH, RS/REHS, CP-FS, Director of Health, City of Middletown Department of Health, facilitated the prioritization, strategy development and discussion phases of the community conversation.

Participants were provided with a list of the health issues, not in rank order, from the CHNA (**Table 1**) and were asked to consider four elements – 1) magnitude of the problem; 2) seriousness of the problem; 3) feasibility of interventions; and 4) presence of significant inequities – to guide the prioritization process. Participants were also asked to consider vulnerable / marginalized populations and the impacts of COVID-19, social determinants of health and health disparities when thinking about the top health issues.

Table 1

Top Ten Health Issues (not in Rank Order)

The top health issues were presented through a virtual poll and participants were asked to identify their top five priority areas. Once the poll was completed, the final results were displayed, indicating the top ranked priorities based on percentage of response (**Table 2**).

Table 2

Priority Areas in Rank Order

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

With the top five priority areas selected, participants were randomly assigned to five virtual breakout rooms. Each breakout room was assigned one of the five priority areas and members were asked to participate in a strategy development group exercise centered around the discussion of three questions in relation to the assigned priority area.

- 1) *How can our community and its resources (in place or not yet developed) provide and support prevention of and care for this priority area?*
- 2) *How does this priority area disproportionately impact some members of the community? And how can we create solutions that equitably benefit all members of our community?*
- 3) *What obstacles might get in the way of addressing this priority area?*
- 4) *What strategies for next steps do you suggest?*

Participants were asked to consider how members of the community and those with lived experience might be involved in co-designing solutions.

At the conclusion of the timed exercise, all participants left the breakout rooms and entered the main virtual room where one member per priority area gave a report out on the insights, actions, and strategies discussed in the breakout rooms. The notes from the report outs will serve as a reference for program design to support the community health improvement CHNA Implementation Strategy goals.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY PRIORITIES & GOALS

The results of the community conversation were integral for informing Middlesex Health’s CHNA Implementation Strategy. From this process, Middlesex Health has selected the below five priority areas. For each priority area Middlesex Health will work with community partners to develop or expand existing evidence-based interventions, prevention and risk reduction initiatives, focusing on those who are disproportionately impacted. Embedded into each initiative will be a focus on social determinants of health and advancing health equity by reducing health disparities.

Priority #1	Mental Health – All Ages
Goal	Improve access to mental health well-being programs and services with an additional focus on trauma and trauma prevention.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community partners and community health workers to develop and / or expand evidence-based intervention, prevention and risk reduction mental health initiatives. • Focus on social determinants of health barriers that may impact access to mental health services and treatment. • Focus on at-risk populations to reduce health disparities.

Priority #2	Substance Use
Goal	Improve access to treatment and support services for individuals struggling with opioid use issues and increase opioid use prevention efforts.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Greater Middletown Area Opioids Task Force, community partners, recovery coaches and community health workers to expand / improve access to treatment and support services for individuals struggling with opioid use issues. • Focus on social determinants of health barriers that may impact access to opioid use services and treatment. • Focus on at-risk populations to reduce health disparities.

Priority #3	Healthy Aging
Goal	Design and implement interventions to promote healthy aging in place and improve outcomes for the aging population.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an interprofessional patient centered in-home geriatric consultative service that coordinates care through an integrated and collaborative approach. • Work with community partners to increase access to community-based older adult services and programs and resources. • Focus on social determinants of health barriers that may impact access to older adult services that promote healthy aging.

Priority #4	Maternal Child Health
Goal	Improve access to maternal child health services for pregnant and postpartum persons, focusing on populations that experience health disparities and disproportionately worse maternal child health outcomes.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community partners and community-based doulas to expand culturally-responsive maternal child health services and to increase access to evidence-based maternal child health services and resources to promote healthy deliveries and postnatal / postpartum outcomes. • Focus on social determinants of health barriers that may impact access to maternal child health services and resources. • Focus on at-risk populations to reduce health disparities.

Priority #5	Chronic Diseases
Goal	Promote healthy life-style changes to reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases, with an additional focus on prevention.
Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Greater Middletown Area Health Enhancement Community Coalition, community partners and community health workers to provide education on prevention of specific chronic diseases with an increased focus on increasing access to nutritious foods. • Focus on social determinants of health barriers that may impact access to resources and services that promote a healthy life-style. • Focus on at-risk populations to reduce health disparities.

CONCLUSION

NEXT STEPS

When developing action plans and strategies for the selected priority areas, each goal will have defined objectives with the intent of measuring impact and program effectiveness through evaluation.

For each priority area, advancing health equity, centering those with lived experience and ensuring that those who are disproportionately impacted by health disparities have a voice at the table will continue to be prioritized.

Middlesex Health looks forward to continuing to work with its existing health and well-being partnerships to develop and / or expand existing programs and initiatives to address the selected priority areas indicated in the Implementation Strategy Priorities & Goals section of this plan. There are many local fully formed community health improvement collaboratives that address targeted health issues and drivers of health, while promoting prevention and well-being and Middlesex Health will continue to align with these existing groups. Additionally, a “next steps” objective of Middlesex Health’s previously completed CHNA Implementation Strategy was to work with community partners to fully develop and expand a county-wide multi-stakeholder coalition designed to improve community health and well-being and advance health equity. To meet this objective, Middlesex Health is a member of and on the leadership team for the Greater Middletown Health Area Enhancement Community (GMAHEC) Coalition, a place-based initiative that supports long-term, collaborative, and cross-sector efforts to improve community health and well-being through broad, systemic change. The goal of the GMAHEC Coalition is to build healthy and equitable communities that actively work together to prevent the development of disease while prioritizing in the co-designing of strategies the voices of those with lived experience and those who are disproportionately impacted by health disparities. Additionally, as the GMAHEC Coalition engages in initiatives that improve the social, economic, and physical conditions within communities and enables individuals and families to meet basic needs, achieve their health and well-being goals, and thrive throughout their lives, there is strong alignment with Middlesex Health’s CHNA Implementation Strategy selected priority areas.

ADOPTION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Middlesex Health Board of Directors approved and adopted the Hospital’s community health needs assessment Implementation Strategy in February 2023, as Internal Revenue Code 501(r)(3) allows a hospital facility’s authorized body an extension for adopting the implementation strategy during the fifth month after the end of the taxable year in which the hospital facility finished conducting the community health needs assessment.

COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS NOT ADDRESSED

Middlesex Health recognizes that it cannot focus on every health and social need identified in its 2022 community health needs assessment and is therefore committed to allocating resources and in-kind time to the highest areas of identified need and / or areas with greatest potential for impact and feasibility (the selected priority areas). Resource constraints prevent the Hospital from addressing every need, and in many cases, other local community based organizations may be better suited to take a leadership role in improving certain health outcomes. As with our previous community health needs assessments, the Hospital will continue to be a willing partner, when able, for initiatives not related to its selected CHNA Implementation Strategy priority areas.



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