



RECOMMENDATION 7

Include Aging in Local Public Health & Hospital Community Health Assessments

STRATEGY 23

Ensure Integration of Age-Related Issues in Community Health Assessments and Action Planning

- a. The Division of Public Health, North Carolina Institute for Public Health, and North Carolina Healthcare Association should help to increase inclusion of aging-related issues in the work of local public health and hospitals by providing these entities with education and technical assistance related to aging priorities, services, and supports to include falls prevention, senior nutrition, mobility, accessibility, transportation planning, and social isolation in community health assessments.
- b. Local health departments and nonprofit hospitals should ensure aging-related issues are included in community health assessments and should grow partnerships with aging-related community organizations.

Desired Result – Improved data collection on community issues related to healthy aging and incorporation of aging-related issues in ongoing community strategies and partnerships.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy? –

Community health assessments identify community strengths and challenges related to health and well-being. Older adults are an important demographic with unique health-related needs that should be quantified and addressed through this assessment. The public health and nonprofit hospital community health assessment process can draw greater attention to the needs of adults and their informal and paid caregivers, and partnerships with aging-related community organizations can strengthen the ability to address those needs. A convening of Trust for America's Health recommended similar activities in its 2017 publication, "A Public Health Framework to Support the Improvement of the Health and Well-being of Older Adults."^c

Context – Community health assessments use data collection and analysis to identify key health needs and issues with room for improvement.³⁶ This information is then used to help state and local health departments develop health improvement plans and identify priority issues.³⁷ Typically, these assessments use principles such as organizing partners, creating a community vision and value statement, and collecting and analyzing data.³⁷ For local health departments in North Carolina, these assessments are required every three to four years as part of an accreditation process.³⁸ Nonprofit hospitals are required by federal tax law to conduct similar assessments every three years.

Chatham County Public Health is an example of successfully integrating aging into their community health assessment. Their community assessment has involved the local Health Alliance, Chatham Hospital and many local providers, including aging.

Community Health Assessment Technical Assistance

The North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH) provides technical assistance for community assessments, offering local health departments and hospital systems a community health assessment and improvement toolkit with training resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other sources. NCIPH can also conduct services like primary data

collection, action planning, and report development.³⁹ As part of its work with local health departments and non-profit hospitals, NCIPH can include trainings on older adult services to keep healthy aging as a priority for community health assessments.

The North Carolina Division of Public Health is responsible for reviewing and approving all community health assessments and can be tasked with examining the assessments to ensure inclusion of aging issues. This is consistent with the Aging in All Policies approach.

The North Carolina Healthcare Association (NCHA) advocates for hospitals, health systems, and care providers, and can provide support and connections necessary for the inclusion of aging issues in the assessments.

Partnerships to Support Action

Partnerships between local health departments and aging-related organizations could help strengthen the likelihood that healthy aging services remain a priority. Appropriate partners include the North Carolina Coalition on Aging (COA), which represents the aging population through a membership of consumers, providers, and advocacy programs and organizations. Members of the COA include the North Carolina Association on Aging, Meals on Wheels Association of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Senior Games. A community assessment approach informed by and working in partnership with COA would give voice to issues that affect older adults. Similarly, local organizations like senior centers and Area Agencies on Aging would be appropriate partners to help identify and address aging-related health needs in a community.

How would this impact the health of older adults?



Increased incorporation of aging-related health assets and needs in community health assessments would improve a multi-sector community focus on falls prevention, mobility, nutrition, and social connections for older adults.

^c Trust for America's Health. *Creating an Age-Friendly Public Health System: Challenges, Opportunities, and Next Steps*. March 2018. https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Age-Friendly_Public_Health_Convening_Report_FINAL_1__1_.pdf