

Data-Informed Community Health

In partnership with the [Fidelis Care Community Connections Program](#), the [Mayors Wellness Campaign \(MWC\)](#) hosted a half day summit for New Jersey mayors and their MWC members. The summit workshop focused on how to develop data-informed programs and how to better engage a variety of community stakeholders in local MWC wellness programs.



The summit speakers included health care professionals, elected officials, community organizers, public health experts, and dedicated MWC volunteers and it was attended by mayors, public health officers, and municipal staff. Above all, the summit was an opportunity for MWC participants from across the state to connect, to share ideas and best practices, and to learn from each other. Key insights from the summit are discussed below.



The Importance of Data and Where to Find It

Utilize existing data sources: Gather data from various sources, including hospitals, public health agencies, community surveys, and existing health databases. Trends can illustrate prioritization, for example mental health service utilization, chronic disease or physical activity levels can be valuable for understanding health priorities in the community.



>> **Communities in Action:** The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) provides access to statewide health data through its [Health Data Dashboard](#), which includes information on chronic diseases, immunization rates, and health disparities at the county level.

>> **Communities in Action:** Collaborate with local and county health departments and community organizations that conduct their own community health assessments through surveys, focus groups and town hall meetings.

Conduct Local Data Collection: Mayors can conduct community surveys, focus groups, town halls, key informant interviews and more to gather feedback on health and wellness needs, interests, and preferences. These surveys can be administered online, through mail, or during community events. Utilize the American Hospital Association (AHA)'s [Community Health Assessment Toolkit](#) for additional support.

>> **Communities in Action:** Bradley Beach conducted a survey in both English and Spanish to gauge interest in wellness activities and identify underrepresented age and cultural groups for more equitable planning.

Identify Gaps in Community Planning: Analyze existing data to identify gaps in health care access, social determinants of health, and disparities in health outcomes among different demographic groups. This data can help prioritize areas in need of intervention.

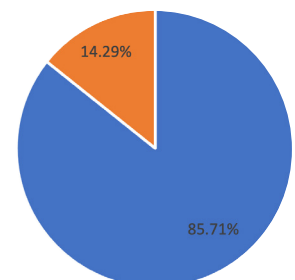
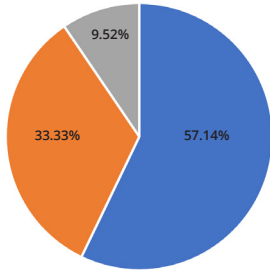


Chart: Blue indicates that participants are very likely to apply what they learned from this workshop to their work, projects, and activities.

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>> **Communities in Action:** Woodbridge Township identified disparities in transportation for seniors and developed the [STOW: Senior Transportation of Woodbridge](#) program to address the issue. Initially, this program was designed for medical transportation assistance and further expanded to include grocery stores and recreational activities.

Chart: Blue indicates that participants' knowledge was increased in various ways.

Focus on Impact and Action: Data should drive the design of programs to ensure they address community needs equitably and effectively. Implement initiatives with measurable goals and outcomes to track impact over time. Communicate those goals and results intentionally to drive engagement and buy-in.

>> **Communities in Action:** Woodbridge Township identified that emergency department visits were high in a particular part of town. They utilized this data to drive initiatives directly in that community to reduce barriers to health care services such as transportation.



Engaging Community Stakeholders

Set and Communicate Expectations: Make an effort to be inclusive and think about whose voice is needed at the table. Make an intentional effort to set expectations and communicate clearly as you are inviting stakeholders to the table. The extra effort and time put in at the front end will create community buy-in and commitment.

>> **Communities in Action:** As part of his planning process, Princeton's Health Officer shares expectations with potential community partners before inviting them to the table. Providing this information upfront ensures that the people engaged in the process will have the interest, expertise and capacity to participate.

Engage Stakeholders Throughout the Process: Involve local health care providers, community organizations, community leaders, and residents throughout the journey, starting in the planning process. Collaborative efforts ensure that programs align with community needs and are well-received.

>> **Communities in Action:** Princeton engages stakeholders throughout the process by conducting regular surveys, seeking feedback from community-based businesses, and collaborating with schools and local organizations.

Foster Diversity in Participation: Cast a wide net. Engage diverse sectors and populations, including youth, older adults, people of color, and individuals with disabilities to assure you are engaging and representing all within your community.

>> **Communities in Action:** Through targeted outreach efforts, Elizabeth conducts wellness tours to each of the city's six wards once a month to actively promote resources,



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services, and activities to their residents. They also use these opportunities to solicit feedback and understand barriers that residents are facing.

Address Disparities: Analyze survey data and health indicators to identify disparities in health outcomes among different groups. Tailor programs to target underrepresented populations and address their specific needs.

>> **Communities in Action:** Woodbridge Township and Bradley Beach plan to target younger age groups and Hispanic/Latino communities in their future surveys and initiatives based on the lack of representation in their previous data collection.

Have an Ear to the Ground: Community partners and leaders have insight into your community that you may not have access to. They will help you learn about the barriers that the community is facing, which will help you design impactful initiatives to address disparities and specific needs.



>> **Communities in Action:** Through open discussions with community leaders, the Director of Health and Human Services in Elizabeth discovered that language barriers and cultural sensitivities were significant challenges faced by the city's diverse population. They partnered with bilingual health workers and cultural organizations to offer multilingual health education and outreach.



Data at Work

Address Health Disparities: Use data to identify gaps in health disparities and prioritize efforts to address them. Target resources, stakeholders, and initiatives towards vulnerable populations to reduce health inequities.

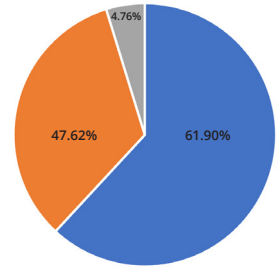
>> **Communities in Action:** Jersey City identified food security as an area of concern. By listening to the residents' request for a community garden and food pantry, they were able to create vertical farming and establish a food pantry directly within a community facing food deserts.

Conduct Regular Data Analysis: Analyze health data regularly to identify patterns, trends, and areas of concern. This ensures programs remain relevant and responsive to changing community health needs and keeps stakeholders engaged and community bought-in to the current initiatives.

>> **Communities in Action:** The [Camden Coalition](#) utilized data to address vaccine hesitancy and collaborated with [community ambassadors](#) to increase vaccination rates in Camden.

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Collaborate with Community Health Workers (CHWs) and Community Ambassadors: They can help disseminate health information and promote programs. These individuals can be trusted resources and conduits for health-related information. In many cases these individuals are representatives of the communities they serve and by including them you are engaging a community advocate.



>> Communities in Action: The Camden Coalition hired community ambassadors who are Camden residents to educate the community to effectively create trust, build relationships and share lived experiences to address vaccine hesitancy.

Chart: Blue indicates that participants' knowledge of data sources in New Jersey was increased.

Engage Youth Population: Engaging youth in community initiatives can be challenging, but the rewards are significant. Data shows that youth participation tends to be lower than any other age group, however, by tailoring programs to address their concerns, such as mental health, and offering incentives like mentorships or trainings, we can improve youth engagement. Empowering youth to contribute strengthens community bonds and their well-being.

>> Communities in Action: Jersey City is engaging rising juniors in [Teen Mental Health First Aid training](#) that can empower them to provide peer support and promote mental health awareness.



By implementing data-informed strategies, community leaders can design and implement impactful wellness programs that address the unique needs of their communities. Engaging stakeholders is crucial to the success of community-driven programs. Creating community partnerships, conducting surveys, and analyzing data regularly will lead to evidence-based decision-making and successful wellness initiatives. These efforts will contribute to improving community health and fostering an inclusive culture of well-being throughout the state of New Jersey.

This project planning and execution was made possible through partnership and funding support from Fidelis Care. Fidelis Care is a managed care organization offering high-quality, culturally sensitive healthcare services, transforming the health of our community, one person at a time.

For more information about the MWC, contact Director of Community Health, [Julie DeSimone](#) at jdesimone.nhcqi.org.