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## Central/Lower Bucks

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the Central/Lower Bucks community focus group identified multiple community assets such as access to quality education, healthcare and other services. Participants described the abundance of colleges and spoke of great school districts within the community. One of the participants highlighted this asset by stating, “When people move into a community, they don’t look – especially on the high list of things, they don’t look at parks first and they don’t look at libraries, they look at schools. Mostly they’re families that have children, so I think schools are a real strong asset in the community.” In addition to education, participants shared their belief that the community is home to some of the best health systems in the world calling it “a hub for healthcare.” This hub includes access to specialty services such as cancer care. Furthermore, participants noted the neighborhood’s accessibility to assets such as libraries, shopping, community events for various age groups, the YMCA, and youth athletics. A member added that they believe their community is safe and stated, “I would add in fairly low crime rate I think in this area compared to other parts of the Southeastern Pennsylvania region as far as safety. I know in my township and my electoral area, I’m very thankful for pretty responsible elected officials.” Other assets mentioned by participants included having a lower tax rate, affordable housing, and Bensalem being recognized as one of the ten best communities. In regards to transportation, participants shared that although cars are necessary, they are fortunate that the Bucks County Transport provides shared ride transportation services at a free to low-range cost for all Bucks county residents.

#### Health Issues

The Central/Lower Bucks community participants expressed their concern for various health issues present in the community. Participants discussed **behavioral health** issues pertaining to mental health, substance use, addiction, depression and suicide, and specified opiates/opioids, smoking and alcohol as substances that affect the community. Barriers to **dental health** were identified as well. “People need dental care. Medicare doesn’t pay for it, you have to get your own insurance, the kids need it and the parents don’t take them because they don’t have the money. There was a truck that used to come around years and years ago, free dental care. They don’t do that anymore, but that was a really needed service for anybody.”

Participants raised concerns regarding **environmental** factors in the community that can potentially affect health conditions. For example, one of the participants stated, “I have a big concern about the environment. I think there’s just a whole lot of unknowns in that area and there’s a lot of suspicions and things that we need to check out, the pollutants in the air, the water that we drink, the things that they spray on the naval air station landing field. All those kinds of things concern me greatly.” Community participants also expressed concern regarding the incidence of cancers in their community as well as neurological, respiratory, and autoimmune diseases. In addition, participants shared that their county is ranked the second or third worst county for air pollution.

Community participants expressed the need for better **nutrition**. Participants described examples of barriers to eating healthy such as high cost, lack of health education and time. One community member stated, “The other thing to know is, though, if you know how to eat healthy, it’s expensive. Eating healthy is expensive. It shouldn’t be, but it is” and another sharing, “Exactly, it’s cheaper to go to McDonald’s and get a meal than it is to get a healthy meal at a supermarket.” Community participants described the high cost of fruits and vegetables and saying being a vegetarian is expensive. Access to

fresh food can pose a problem if you don't know how to prepare meals and one member stated, "You have to know how to cook it. There's stuff you have to know that people don't teach you."

Community participants discussed concerns regarding the **quality and access** of health care services and described long wait times to get an appointment with specialists and at times with primary care physicians. They expressed their understanding of utilizing urgent care centers and said it fills a gap to prevent Emergency Department over-utilization. Participants believe the healthcare system is fragmented and individuals are confused about how health insurance works. They shared the need for medical-legal partnerships, dental care, and more beds for those facing substance use addiction. Participants also expressed concern with affordability and the high cost of medication.

Community participants emphasized several factors that affect the health of **children and youth**. Participants shared the belief that support for parenting is necessary in the community and one member stated, "Parents need to be present, to be good role models." Participants also identified a need for more health care centers for children in their community. Other needs for children and youth include affordable daycare, early education, maintaining their immunizations, and addressing mental health conditions and autism. Participants discussed the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying in children, youth and young adults. They fear violent acts faced by teenagers such as school shootings and the amount of stress they may undergo with college related loans and financial concerns. Participants discussed suicide, depression, drug overdose, peer pressure, workforce development, and gender identity as social and health issues faced by **young adults** in the community.

Community participants expressed the need for better **coordination and navigation of healthcare** for the **older adult** population. In addition, participants identified a need for more high quality nursing homes; one community member stated, "Well, nursing homes is another big, horrible problem. There's not enough of them, there's not enough good ones. They should have nursing homes that are well-staffed." Focus group participants described **transportation** barriers that impact older adults' ability to pick-up their medication or access other resources due to lack of transportation. In addition, community participants believe this population has **financial concerns** that they may not be able to have enough money for both medication and food.

### Priorities

The health priorities listed by participants in Central Lower Bucks included education, behavioral health, the physical environment, insurance coverage and affordability, navigation and education, and quality of care. Specifically, residents mentioned mental health and opioids as key aspects of behavioral health, and insurance coverage and affordability as it related to specialist care, child care, and elder care.

### Solutions

Participants of the Central Lower Bucks community focus group described several solutions to the health issues in their community. Education about health issues and utilizing natural community hubs such as beauty salons, barber shops, and faith-based institutions as points of dissemination were common themes. "Wherever a lot of people meet and congregate is a very good place to have education. I'll use an example: churches. Churches would be a very good source of having the education, have health fairs, have opportunities to have practitioners come in and talk about cancer, talk about diabetes, talk about overweight, talk about various health needs." Community organizations and assets were noted as resources more community members could take advantage of, noting a strategy to "increase awareness of resources such as Gilda's Club – a really great resource for whether you're the cancer patient or the

caregiver or a member of the family, Warminster Community Park, the YMCA, AVI Rehab.” Focus group participants also believe that their community would benefit from better coordination of healthcare and distribution of Narcan.

## Far North Philadelphia

### Summary

#### Community Assets

The participants of the Far North Philadelphia community focus group described their community as a nice middle-class community with convenient transportation, affordable housing, a strong business community and access to diverse community organizations such as the library, churches, hospitals (Einstein) and schools and universities (Lasalle). Focus group participants also remarked that the neighborhood is clean, and well maintained by residents. "It's clean. It's not like a lot of other neighborhoods where there is a lot of trash on the street, you know, people dump certain things on the corners. Not a lot of graffiti, freshly cut lawns." Diversity of the community was also seen as a community asset. Residents were described as "people of different races living harmoniously" and as informed, responsible citizens who work collaboratively. Cherelle Parker, the local council person, was also cited as an asset – "she's in tune with what needs to happen and is very energetic and enthusiastic about making things happen."

#### Education

Participants did voice a few major concerns regarding education in their community including the need to create learning environments geared to children with special needs. Discussion focused on stigmatization of children with ADHD or behavioral issues and concerns about the use of medication to control behavior. One participant shared that there needs to be more attention to proper diagnosis and alternative learning environments to meet the needs of children. "You know...medicating children without even really figuring out what their real issues are... Some children need maybe a different learning environment than others. And then they are stigmatized with ADHD or just being problem children, and it kind of goes on to adulthood, where they are put on the medication or they're put in the system, simply from something that could've just been changed, if they would have been, let's say, in a different type of class, a smaller class, a shorter class, or you know, different things like that affect children in the wrong way, in the long run."

#### Health Issues

Focus group participants voiced concerns about **limited access to and the quality of behavioral health services**. Substance use and the opioid epidemic were seen as "straining the system." Lack of mental health providers and cost of behavioral health services were identified as barriers to behavioral health services, "I think some of it is covered under Medicaid, but see if you are a working middle class poor, I ain't got no money for that...So the ones that's on Medicaid, right, they can get it. But if you, you got a regular insurance, it is darn near impossible, and they'll tell you, well we don't pay for that. **Quality** of available mental health services was also mentioned by several participants as problematic. One participant shared, "The quality of service you get on your Medicaid is highly lacking. They sort you and can send you to certain places. So for mental health, the places are already overrun and underfunded... you can't really get what you need. You have to really, really advocate for yourself. You have to be your own caseworker, because you won't get what you need, nine times out of 10, because they're overrun." Treating substance use was also seen a major challenge facing health care and the community by all focus group participants. One person described substance use treatment as a revolving door saying "you have an abundance of people who need services and only so many people to service them. Inadvertently, what happens is, it's a revolving door. If people don't get the service that they require, they come in, they go out, they come back in, they go out, they come back in." The behavioral health system was described as underfunded and overworked. The Mental Health First Aid for Teens course

offered by the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disabilities was noted as an excellent and effective resource for understating and addressing mental health issues among teens. Behavioral health issues were highlighted as a problem among older adults.

Participants shared that **older adults** are dealing with substance use, depression, and social isolation due to death of friends and family commitments – “the kids can't come over as much as you would like or just because they have their lives, not that they don't want to, it's just hard to check in with mom or grandma.”

**Chronic diseases** such as diabetes, obesity and asthma, infectious diseases (sexually transmitted infections), health behaviors, access to care and the built environment were listed by participants of the focus group as health issues of concern in the Far North Philadelphia community. Participants identified the high rate of obesity, especially among children, and the underlying root causes as areas of concern. The preponderance of inexpensive fast food and lack of physical activity in schools were identified as risk factors for obesity; “I have noticed that fast food is very, very available...in low income areas. It's full of fillers and useless calories. Hamburger, French fries and a drink for five bucks. When parents don't have a lot of money, of course that's how you're going to fill up.”

**Environmental** health concerns were linked to higher rates of obesity, asthma and increased food allergies among **youth**. Participants noted that community safety concerns limit “kids being able to play outside” and as a result youth spend more time on sedentary activities that involve “too much screen time.” Community safety was also cited as a concern among **older adults** as well – “I go to work on weekends and I catch a bus...I am in the area at five in the morning...I never thought in my lifetime I'd be afraid at that time in the morning to be out at the bus stop... I'll be 60 this year, and I pretty much have to call my fiancée and say, listen, I'm at Broad and Eerie. Every time I get on the bus, I call her, because I'm afraid something could happen.”

**Access to healthcare services and concerns about quality** were voiced by multiple focus group participants. According to participants, Chestnut Hill Hospital is the only hospital serving their community and there are no Urgent Care Centers. Participants shared that they go to Abington, Flourtown and Willow Grove when they need urgent care. The need for health services specifically for children (hospital services) were also highlighted by focus group participants. Participants noted financial barriers to care including health insurance issues and out of pocket costs. Finally, access to health and behavioral services for the **disabled** was noted as problematic in their community. Support provided by an advocate, caseworker or family member on behalf of the disabled individual was highly recommended to ensure needed health and behavioral health services are obtained and patients don't “fall through the cracks.”

Several focus group participants discussed **communication with health care providers** as concerning. Terms such as “inconclusive results” and “suspect results” were seen as problematic, “The testing was inconclusive, and it's suspect, you know. I don't like to hear words like suspect when we're talking medically...Suspect, what does that mean? I want a test that confirms the tests...Now, I'm faced with a decision. I have to make a decision on suspect”.

Equity in terms of **access to healthy, affordable food** was discussed at length and was seen as linked to one's social class. Focus group participants noted differences in food quality among various grocers and that the quality and cost of food varies depending on which community you live in. Additionally, participants reported that in their community transportation to food stores requires a car or using the

“hack-man” (unofficial cars that provide taxi services) as public transportation does not go to supermarkets in the community. One participant shared “we talk about the 5<sup>th</sup> Street corridor and the businesses, thriving businesses, but there are a lot of like pizza, cheesesteak, restaurants. If I don't have a vehicle, if I don't have transportation and this is the food that I have access to on a daily basis, as opposed to it being a weekend treat, that affects your health.” Healthier food choices were also seen as more expensive and the sugar beverage tax was cited as limiting access to soda and other beverages. Participants shared that “the things that you know you're supposed to be having with your children, those kinds of things are not that accessible. Like fresh fish, you know, 12 bucks a pound. I mean, who can afford that in this area?” One participant summed up the issues related to healthy eating as “But having your SNAP card and buying healthy stuff, when your corner store has nothing, then it's like, well, I'm working three jobs, well, I'm just going to buy what I buy. So we have to make it accessible, there has to be education involved in it, and you have to be able to make things actually available to the person in the neighborhood”.

Focus group participants identified many health concerns relevant to **children and youth** including: exposure to incidents that can result in trauma, bullying and peer pressure, anger management, and intergenerational relationships. Suicide rates were perceived as increasing among youth. Participants in the focus group felt that youth experienced multiple sources of trauma including, absent father figures and male role models, parental abandonment leading to entry into the foster care system, and parental use of drugs. Anger and acting out behaviors observed among youth was felt to be an outcome from trauma exposures. As one participant shared- “you have a lot of kids who are in foster care, they have abandonment issues. So that's another thing that these children are dealing with. They are not being raised by their biological parents. They're in a foster care setting, not with a relative, so you would be angry. So yeah, that's what these young people deal with.” Peer pressure and bullying were also seen as potentially trauma producing and social media was thought to exacerbate this among youth. Finally, focus group participants described social and family situations facing the youth of Far North Philadelphia that may lead youth to pursue activities such as selling drugs. “In some ways, the adolescent population has lost faith in the adult population... I had to work with teens who sold drugs because that was how the family survived...But it becomes a lifestyle that you get so steeped in, and for the child who is doing that and appears successful, he attracts others who see that you got money, you got clothes, you got girls. What's to think about? And when they see maybe their parents are working and struggling and still not able to provide, they lose faith in the system.”

### **Priorities**

The health priorities in Far North Philly pertained to education, behavioral health, health behaviors, nutrition, the social environment, availability of services, and insurance coverage and affordability. Residents specifically mentioned addiction and mental health as behavioral issues, fitness as a health behavior, youth education at a community center for the needs of the social environment, and access to emergency care as an availability of services priority.

### **Solutions**

Focus group participants suggested that older adults need more activities that promote healthy eating and physical activity and are provided where they feel safe. Conveniently located senior/community centers are needed where older adults can learn about and gain access to resources such as Meals on Wheels and rent rebate programs.

## Far Northeast Philadelphia

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the Far Northeast community focus group discussed several strengths and assets of their community including the neighborhood's perceived **accessibility**, including walkability, ample public transportation, and the presence of ample health care resources such as doctors, dentists, and hospitals. Participants also felt that the availability to employment and education opportunities is a strength of their community.

The focus group participants discussed community members' civic engagement and willingness to take part in **community organizations** as a strength of their community. One participant stated, "Now, I'm in East Torresdale and they also have a very strong civic group. A lot of people actually show up for the meetings, which is really nice." Participants also highlighted their neighborhood's diversity as a strength: "You have different religions up here, you have different cultures, a lot of different immigrants. You have people of all ethnicities and racial groups, so there is a lot of diversity here. It isn't always obvious by looking at people, but there is."

#### Education

Participants in the focus group felt that public schools in the area have declined in quality. "I feel the public school system isn't as good as it used to be," said one participant. Public schools were seen as unsafe, even for parents. "I would never send my children to a school like that, or even me as a parent, walk into a school." Others expressed frustration that schools and teachers don't play a larger role as a community resource. "It's like they close up at 3:00, teachers go home and it is desolate, rather than becoming part of the community."

#### Health Issues

Participants described several health issues as priorities to be addressed in their community. Numerous mentions of substance use and drug overdoses highlighted the issue as one of the community's most pressing **behavioral health** concerns. They shared perceived barriers to therapy and medication to address these needs. "So, once they go to the rehab, there's nothing that keeps them on that straight path. Say they go away for 60 days or 30 days, when they get out, there's nothing for them," said one participant. Participants also talked about the prevalence of anxiety and depression in the community, both among children and adults, again, highlighting barriers to therapy and medication to address behavioral health needs. Finally, participants perceived suicide as common and attributed it to both bullying in schools and drug addiction.

Though the focus group highlighted an overall availability of local health care resources, challenges were expressed regarding health care **quality and access** for low-income populations who have to travel farther to obtain affordable medical care. "People that don't have access to insurance or can't afford insurance, there's only one [local] place for them to go, or they have to go all the way downtown," said one participant. Additionally, many stated that their community's lack of an emergency department (ED) and difficulty scheduling with their primary care doctor means that they frequently use urgent care. Participants stated that wait times were common and frustrating. An office visit required waiting several



weeks, while going to the ED might require waiting several hours to receive care. One participant stated that urgent care provided a promising alternative because they provide care much more quickly. Though there are some local services intended to provide preventive care to low-income populations, they have challenges engaging with parents whose children may benefit from those services.

Participants discussed that many people in the neighborhood face challenges with earning too much to qualify for public insurance, but not enough to afford private health insurance. Participants felt that high deductibles for **health insurance** create a financial burden such that it is almost not worth it to have private health insurance. Participants reported that the financial burden of deductibles discourages some community members from accessing primary care, meaning that their health conditions worsened or went undetected for too long. The focus group participants relayed that they have difficulty understanding the cost of health insurance and that there is little transparency in health care costs. Respondents also stated that they have difficulty finding doctors that they trust who also accept their health insurance and who are local.

Car and motorcycle accidents were perceived as a common event, creating a dangerous everyday **environment** for both vehicles and pedestrians. "I'm coming from that perspective because we see a lot of kids who say, 'My sister was crossing Roosevelt Boulevard and she was killed,' or motorcycles accidents, and also car racing accidents up here in Northeast, illegal car racing." Despite community parks being noted as an asset, participants expressed that many parks are lacking trees to provide coverage for pedestrians, especially during warmer months.

Participants of the Far Northeast focus group highlighted cancer – particularly breast cancer – as a **chronic disease** priority. Additionally, respondents noted diabetes and cardiovascular disease as conditions that have a significant impact on their community.

Focus group participants expressed a perceived lack of social cohesion among some community members as a **limited resource**. This may be because they are renters who are not invested as a long-term presence in the community, but it may also be the result of absentee landlords that don't maintain their properties. One respondent stated that trash in the neighborhood was common and found it frustrating that their neighbors did not see keeping the neighborhood clean as a priority.

### **Priorities**

The health priorities in Far Northeast included behavioral health, the social environment, and insurance coverage and affordability. Participants specifically mentioned mental health and substance abuse as behavioral health priorities and community and social interaction as social environment priorities.

### **Solutions**

The focus group participants stated that organized activities such as mindfulness training, yoga, or meditation would be welcome in the community. Participants also mentioned empowering community organizations to apply for grant funding to expand services already in place in the community, as a potential solution to limited resources. Many expressed a desire for large institutions such as hospitals or the school district to have more of a connection to the community. "One of the things that bothers me is when... since we are talking about health, health institutions a lot of times just feel like they're in

and of themselves, their own entity. They don't really connect much with the city, the neighborhoods," said one participant. Finally, participants expressed a desire for children to be exposed to anti-drug curriculum beginning in elementary school.

## Honey Brook

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the Honey Brook community focus group noted several strengths and **assets that their community** provides, including ample access to libraries, parks, churches, community green spaces, access to health care services, and engaged community organizations. Participants mentioned the unique geographic location of Honey Brook as having both positive and negative implications for the community, as it sits on the border of three counties: Chester, Lancaster, and Berks. This provides access to many amenities; however, community members are often unaware of what is offered in neighboring counties because “the community has naturally become insular.” A major theme of the meeting focused on the **aging population** in the community and need to focus resources and efforts on supporting these members.

#### Health Issues

Participants are concerned with the growing costs of housing and utilities, compounded by flat rates of income growth and social security payments, saying that it creates financial stressors for many community members. Additionally, several participants expressed that the **built environment** in Honey Brook is not safe or accessible for people using wheelchairs.

Focus group participants also expressed concern with growing **behavioral health** and substance use needs in the community, even more regarding the opioid epidemic’s impact on youth in the area. One member stated, “The youth have been hit hard with the opioid crisis, too, because they suffer sports injuries and are then given prescription drugs, so they’ve been hit hard with that.” Participants discussed stigma as a cause of limited access to resources. Other concerns for **children and youth** include vaping, high rates of suicide, unmet mental health needs, bullying, and obesity. Participants were also concerned that children and youth have a lack of consistent **food** options when school is out of session in the Summer, as well as a general lack of food adequacy in the area.

**For older adults**, loneliness and social isolation were noted as unmet behavioral health needs.

Participants also felt that there was a lack of **quality and access** to aging-in-place services for seniors, as well as an adequate stock of senior living facilities. “We need more supports for people who want to age-in-place. Especially for this aging community that is very, very important. I think more and more people want that choice.” Older adults spoke to concerns **navigating the changing health care landscape**, specifically, how technology is advancing in regards to online ordering of prescriptions, electronic health records, and access to medical records. “Doctors need to slow down, spend less time on computers, and build a relationship with us. Be more patient.” This was also true for the Honey Brook area at-large, with many focus group participants wanting the community to adapt advances in technology to meet the needs of seniors and their cognitive and physical abilities (self-check out kiosks at grocery stores, the airport, gas stations, etc.).

Limited **quality and access** to preventative health services, occupational medicine, and urgent care centers were expressed at the meeting. Additionally, participants are concerned with the lack of **insurance affordability and costs of health care**, especially for seniors with fixed incomes. “Seniors are living longer than expected, so the money we planned to retire with is running out. Now some of us have to choose between medication and food.”

## Priorities

The health priorities listed by participants in the Honey Brook focus group meeting included behavioral health, chronic disease, health behaviors, nutrition, insurance coverage and affordability, availability of services, navigation and education, and vulnerable populations. Issues of quality and access as they relate to navigation and education stood out as a major issue. Participants specifically mentioned mental health as a behavioral health priority, obesity and hearing problems as chronic disease priorities, technology and bullying as health behavior issues, food access as a nutrition priority, elder care as an availability of services issues, aging-in-place support services, transportation, awareness of services, and occupational medicine as navigation and education priorities, and homelessness as a vulnerable populations issue.

## Solutions

**Solutions** mentioned during the meeting included increasing access to patient advocates for seniors in the community, specifically when they have doctor's appointments, and overall better interventions to help seniors navigate health services (e.g., understanding medications and electronic health records). One participant said, "I think doctors are being pressured to do things in a certain timeframe, but having an advocate is a really good way to make it work for both." Participants would like to see intergenerational job opportunities for local youth to engage with seniors – providing a two-way benefit for both parties. One suggestion was having youth employed by grocery and retail stores available to help seniors with their shopping (e.g., pushing cart, reaching for items, checking out). Increased access to social service hubs and a proposed public information database were raised as a solution for the Honey Brook community as it sits on the corner of three counties, creating barriers of understanding and awareness of services. For **older adults** in Honey Brook, focus group participants want more options in terms of senior care facilities, and/or support services that allow seniors to age-in-place. To address a lack of access to transportation services for older adults, participants would like to see increased availability of telehealth services, as well as a community hub that provides accessibility to health care, like urgent care and occupational medicine, as well as social services to promote sociability amongst seniors in the community.

## Lansdale

### Summary

#### Community Assets

The participants of the Lansdale community focus group discussed a variety of community assets. **Community organizations**, spiritual organizations, community parks, and local government were all considered substantial assets by the focus group participants. Manna, the PEAK center, and the YMCA were cited as partners that make the community stronger. Participants discussed many options in Lansdale for good access to healthy food and fresh produce via the farmer's market, grocers, and accessible transportation. The group also felt that the neighborhood's accessibility, racial and cultural diversity, and public events such as concerts were assets to the community. Finally, focus group participants highlighted the Montgomery County Health Department and a key asset to health in their community. "We have a fabulous health department in Montgomery County. They are stellar. They really are. They are on top of inspections for the restaurants and the school cafeterias and I am really impressed by them, because it's not the case everywhere, but they are awesome."

#### Education

While some focus group participants noted the strength of the local school district as a positive aspect of their community, participants also discussed current stressors for children in the school environment and the mental health needs in schools. "They're frightened and I think they need more mental health in the schools to help, you know, providers to help the kids in the schools. They have these shelter in place things all the time, where they have these drills, and I know my grandson is terrified by those. I think all of, just the way the world is nowadays, and all the access to all the news and on social media and everything, I think we really need a lot of emphasis to be on the mental health of our children, so that they can grow up to be normal without having all these fears. I think they really need access to that in the schools especially." Bullying was also highlighted as a barrier to health and an issue that warrants attention in the educational system. "Bullying as well. I mean, the schools are great at doing as much as they can, but they are overwhelmed. The counselors are overwhelmed. The issues of trauma leading up to this is significant, and I'm fearful. I'm fearful for the future of their health as adults, because they've been through so much stress and anxiety during their teenage years." Participants discussed a need for additional funding and transportation to support families in accessing after school programs.

#### Health Issues

Participants discussed concerns with **behavioral health and substance use** among young people as a problem in the community, with one participant reflecting on how widespread substance use is in the community. "The availability of substances to young people is a problem, it is prevalent everywhere, whether it's opioids or illegal or, you know, there's a lot of issues." Participants reported that substance use treatment is available but not frequently accessed by the target population. Additionally, focus group participants discussed the impact of the substance use on perceived safety in their community. "Then the other thing is safety with so much drugs now, a lot of times you're fearful going out, being out by yourself. You don't want to anyway, you shouldn't, and we have so much homeless here, you know, sometimes you're afraid of them. You can't know how they'll react, whether they're hostile or friendly."

There was concern among participants about the **accessibility** of health care services in Lansdale, specifically regarding challenges accessing health care due to financial and employment constraints. Participants discussed the benefits of **urgent care**, which was perceived as more responsive to immediate needs and was generally perceived as being easier to access for community members than

traditional health care settings. Long wait times was specifically mentioned as a barrier and frustration when accessing mental health services.

The **cost of health care** was an additional concern for participants. One shared a story of a neighbor's struggles saying, "they were so afraid of calling 911 because of the cost of the ambulance, knowing that insurance may not pay for it, the only way they pay for it is if you check in the hospital."

Participants focused much of the conversation on perceived problems with individuals who are experiencing **homelessness** in the community, especially in regards to **community safety**. "We have homeless people living just on our little area that we have with chairs and tables; they've laid there, but they sit and smoke there. There's hundreds of cigarettes all over the ground."

Focus group participants expressed concerns about health issues for **young children and adolescents**. One of the challenges reported applied more specifically to the parents of young children, who face difficulty balancing the competing priorities of **child care** and work. "With minimum wage, you know, it's nearly impossible, I think, to afford good daycare. And a lot of daycares are open during normal work hours, and a lot of parents are not necessarily working during those normal hours." Participants focused to a larger extent on their concerns related to teenagers. The challenges of mental health and bullying in school were mentioned by several participants. Participants also felt that part of the problem for adolescents in the community may be that youth don't engage in activities outside of home or school. One observed, "I know in the Lansdale area, there isn't any recreation for teenagers. There wasn't when I was raising my kids, there isn't anything really for them to do," while another stated, "North Penn has one of the greatest activities after school, during school, but they don't take advantage of it."

Social isolation and self-efficacy were notable concerns for **older adults** in the community, especially regarding challenges that seniors face in knowing what resources are available to them in the community. "I think one of the things we see a lot is that technology is the way people get a lot of information now, and a lot of seniors don't have access to the technology to get the information out of the system." Additionally, the group raised **safety** as an issue that could affect seniors more than other community members. One participant shared, "I find myself personally looking over my shoulder. I did not do that five or 10 years ago for sure."

### **Priorities**

In Lansdale, participants mentioned education, behavioral health, the physical environment, health behaviors, nutrition, social determinants, the social environment, neighborhood safety and appearance, insurance coverage and affordability, navigation and education, and vulnerable populations as health priorities. Issues relating to the social environment, insurance coverage and affordability, and navigation and education stood out as prominent priorities for many participants. Specifically participants described youth guidance as an education priority, mental health as behavioral health priority, ADA compliance as a physical environment priority, vaccines as a health behavior priority, safe and affordable housing and jobs as important social determinants, isolation, community interaction and community programming as social environment priorities, prescriptions, emergency care, and mental health as insurance and affordability priorities, transportation as a navigation and education priority and homelessness as a vulnerable populations priority.

## Lower Northeast

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Community members of the Lower Northeast identified various community assets that contribute to the health and wellbeing of the neighborhood. Participants shared their belief that people in their community support and hold each other up, which is seen as one of the community's greatest assets. One participant stated, "Yeah, we get along, you know, we do things and a lot of times we come together." Although community members expressed concerns of discrimination in their community, within Philadelphia, they continued to share an anecdote of a time the community rallied together to protest against discrimination. Participants went on to describe the accessibility of transportation as a strength of the Lower Northeast community stating, "I just leave my car parked, and then I get on the bus; you can go anywhere" and "We've got plenty of opportunity to catch a bus or a train." In addition, members mentioned access to parks as a community asset and said, "There's more parks than bars... I used to live on 52<sup>nd</sup> and Girard and everywhere you go on each corner there's a bar; but up here, you go around every four blocks, it's a park."

#### Education

Participants of the focus group expressed unmet educational needs for students in the community. For example, class sizes are too large, special-needs students lack support in the classroom, and there needs to be improvement in teaching reading, spelling and math. Focus group participants believe that teachers are facing too much stress in the classroom. In addition, participants shared concerns for the youth and young adults spending too much time with technology and not as much time on school work and their education; one participant stated, "Kids don't get to be kids anymore and are too occupied with phones, tablets and social media." Other concerns identified by participants include the quality of education in reading, spelling and math and the need for equity in education. Participants expressed the need for improvements in the education system in order to provide each student with an equal opportunity to attain educational success.

#### Health Issues

Focus group participants identified many health issues affecting the youth and young adults of the Lower Northeast community. They described the **use and availability of drugs** as an important community issue, especially among middle and high school students. One of the participants shared that "Mental illness for many of them is a major issue" and another stated, "I think it just starts at home, because the drugs are in their medicine cabinet." Participants raised other youth and young adult health issues such as asthma, bullying, and poor physical activity, and shared beliefs that youth are seen as spending too much time on their phones, tablets, and social media. One participant shared, "I feel like that really takes away from what they can really do with themselves." Physical inactivity was also discussed as a concern particularly among youth. Lack of affordable activities such as sports and safety concerns are felt to be contributing to physical inactivity. One participant shared, "They're not going outside. It seems dangerous." Participants of the focus group expressed lack of **nutritional food options** as another health issue affecting the community and shared that there are many pizza stores and only some supermarkets – specifically a Shoprite and "lots of small stores."

Participants of the Lower Northeast focus group expressed concerns with **accessing healthcare, its high cost, and difficulty navigating services**. Participants raised issues with the amount of time it takes to get an appointment and feel that physicians are taking on more than they can handle, are overbooked, or not taking new patients. Although individuals may have insurance, the cost of healthcare is a concern for

community members with one participant stating, “If you have money, you have care. You’ve got to have money” and described situations when the cost of medicine caused a person to decide whether to pay for better quality food or their medicine. In addition, accessing healthcare, understanding Medicare and Medicaid and its cost is perceived as not well understood among community members. Participants also described limited resources in their community to assist individuals who need to apply for and access Medicaid.

Participants shared several concerns for the **children, youth, and young adults** of the Lower Northeast. In comparison to older generations, focus group participants believe kids are no longer participating in organized sports, which is one way to help kids maintain their health. Participants believe there should be more sports available in school so kids can be more physically active. Participants expressed their concern that kids in this digital age have too much access to phones and tablets and are in front of technology and playing video games for too long. One parent commented, “My son has poor eyesight right now, and I think it is due to them always having the phone close to his face.” Parents shared concern with the potential for misdiagnosis of ADHD and over-medicating children. Young adults face other issues regarding drugs, bullying and the pressure of ‘trying to fit in’. Participants also highlighted a need for more programs to support single parents.

Focus group participants expressed social and health wellbeing concerns for **older adults** due to social isolation, lack of outreach, fear of getting help, lack of access to dental care, eye care, and mobility. One member shared, “Well, when folks get older and they can’t pay the bills or handle the property, they want to transition to either federal housing or assisted living facilities and so access and knowing what your options are, and then the cost factor, I think they are community issues that are definitely something all seniors have to face.”

### **Priorities**

The health priorities in Lower Northeast Philadelphia included behavioral health, the social environment, and insurance coverage and affordability. Participants specifically mentioned mental health and substance abuse as behavioral health priorities and community and social interaction as social environment priorities. Two of the priorities specially applied to the youth, and one applied to older adults.

### **Solutions**

Members shared various types of existing and necessary solutions to address the social and health concerns of the community. The need for community members coming together and advocating for shared beliefs, increasing community engagement, improving education, reducing stress for teachers, and increasing the availability of sports programs for kids and summer programs aimed at giving youth a purpose. Community members expressed the importance of empowering communities to take action and working with and helping single parents and parents to reduce stress.

## **Norristown**

### **Summary**

#### **Community Assets**

Participants of the Norristown focus group described several strengths and assets of their community, including accessibility, availability of food resources, the library, and a strong sense of community.



Participants noted that Norristown offered a more welcoming environment than Philadelphia, with one participant sharing, “Even when I was dealing with homelessness, the other people that were around, they were very helpful. Even though they had nothing as well, they would help out with the little bit of things that they did have.” Participants were also quick to highlight the many **community organizations** that offer services to low-income or homeless populations. Participants noted that the geographic proximity of these resources created easier access for community members, saying “[in] Philadelphia, you probably got to go 18 blocks before you get to any source of help. [...] Then once you get from there, you got to go another 15 blocks just to actually get to the destination they want you to get.”

## Health Issues

**Mental and behavioral health** was a consistent theme of the focus group. Participants’ conversation focused on the challenges of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly in the **homeless** community. One participant brought up how LGBTQ youth may encounter mental health difficulties and homelessness more frequently, and how the geographic and social isolation of Norristown makes LGBTQ youth feel unwelcome. The group also talked about the challenges of homelessness for children - whether couch surfing or in shelters - and the extent to which it places them in potentially traumatizing or dangerous situations. “There was a particular young lady who was couch surfing with her child and that wasn’t good. Because the person who she was couch surfing was a little bit – it wasn’t physically abusive but was more like mentally and emotionally abusive to her and the kid.” Similarly, another participant shared that adolescent boys may be split up from their mothers in homeless shelters due to policies that don’t allow males above a certain age to stay in the same quarters as women.

Participants talked about the many ways in which **housing** affects health in their community, mentioning mold, cockroaches, and bedbugs, as ways in which asthma is affected by poor quality housing.

Though it was not a primary focus of discussion, **food and nutrition** was raised several times. Norristown was not perceived to be a food desert, per se, but one interviewee shared, “the less healthier foods are more accessible and they are cheaper. It’s hard to get fresh produce.” Additionally, the absence of food security due to summer recess and holidays was a concern for school-aged children in the community.

Members described the challenges of living in a community with high prevalence of **behavioral health needs** including substance use and why its visibility is difficult for residents. “My biggest concern is, you know, I was down at the transportation center one day and there was actually **needles** laying [around]. That’s a big concern when you have children playing on the playground.” Focus group participants highlighted the substance use needs of the community as having a significant impact on **neighborhood safety** and the **environment**. The group shared the ways in which some public spaces go unused by many residents because of **public substance use** and intoxication. Two participants discussed how much of a local park goes unused by children because of a culture there of drinking in public that parents perceive as unsafe for children to be around. Additionally, the more everyday concern of **trash and litter** was brought up at several points during the focus group, with one participant reflecting that “[...] in certain surroundings people litter, so it’s like dirty and it makes you feel depressed.”

Concerns regarding **quality and access to health services** were raised during the Norristown focus group. Participants discussed the challenges of adult children in the community **caring for their elderly parents**. The adult children have medical difficulties of their own and there was a sense that resources, if available were not widely known to this the relevant population. Conversely, another participant discussed the challenges of older adults who have disabled adult children who live with them and are in

need of medical and social support services, in part, due to stigma. One participant spoke about the need for **care coordination** for people receiving treatment for multiple conditions, highlighting a perceived need for increased communication between providers for substance use treatment, mental health, and physical health. Similarly, there is a need for greater **continuity of care**, particularly for mental health. Participants raised concerns regarding discharge processes from mental health hospitals and patient needs for medication, however not being able to immediately access psychiatric care.

Members of the town hall felt that **transportation** for elderly and disabled was a substantial gap in community resources and resulted in social isolation for the elderly. Another group member felt that the community's **lack of activities** for children such as a YMCA contributed to children's behavioral problems. Some group members felt that this resulted in children spending too much time playing video games and on electronic devices.

One participant shared that the **Hispanic community** may face unique vulnerability related to slumlords and quality housing, expressing, "I especially feel bad for the Hispanic community because they want even complain because they're afraid to complain. They're just terrified. [...] I know they're crowding people into what should be a four-bedroom house, they're turning into four apartments. That's a safety issue [...] but the landlords don't care. They charge extra money per person." Language barriers were also highlighted as a health issue for the Norristown community, specifically for Asian and Latino community members. "I was going to say with talking to families with children like in mental health services, there's a big language barrier for the Latino community because the parents don't speak English and the children need services. They're having to relay all this information to a child that then has to – that's the biggest problem, so then they're not going because there is that language barrier."

### Priorities

Participants in Norristown listed education, the physical environment, social determinates, the social environment, availability of services, insurance costs and affordability, navigation and education, and vulnerable populations as health priorities in their communities. Specifically, participants referenced youth education as an education and social environment issue, parks as a physical environment priority, transportation as a navigation and education priority, and homelessness as a vulnerable population priority. One of the most common refrains from the focus group was the need for **affordable housing** in Norristown. One participant clarified that this doesn't just mean a need for *any* housing, but a need for affordable, safe, and clean housing. For others, the need for housing was more about a need for places where homeless persons can spend time during the day and at night and where they can store their belongings without fear of theft. Participants also felt that there is a disparity in the availability of housing assistance resources for people *without* mental illness.

### Solutions

Increased funding to community programs that support vulnerable populations and free access to community resources such as the zoo were highlighted as potential solutions to challenges in the Lansdale community.

## North Philadelphia East

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the North Philadelphia East focus group identified community organizations and the people of the community as major assets of their community. Community organizations that provide programs and services to youth and older adults as well as those that assist with housing, food access and other social needs were specifically mentioned. Community organizations, such as the Lighthouse, were valued for their outreach to youth, particularly afterschool programs that provide structured activities. Community organizations serving older adults were also cited by several participants for providing socialization opportunities for those who might otherwise be isolated, and as a place that provides access to health services (i.e. flu shots) and other social resources. Participants shared, “I think the fact that there are senior citizen centers, where the senior citizens would go and socialize, it helps to keep their mind sharper, and they get out and are not just up in the house by themselves.” Community Development Corporations were valued for helping residents with housing information, but also, along with the faith-based institutions, for providing assistance with food, clothing and school supplies. Importantly, community leaders and residents were identified by several participants as critical community assets, “but the fact that you have your block captains and your committee people and you have people who are community leaders within their own, to me, they are some of the greatest assets that you have for your community.”

#### Education

Focus group participants identified multiple themes related to education including quality and safety concerns, unmet student needs, lack of resources and services, as well as equity among schools. In terms of preschool, safety and other concerns were raised associated with housing children aged 3-6 in the same building as eighth graders. Concerns about the potential of preschool staff to provide high quality education were also shared by several participants. One participant stated that you need to “Catch them while they're young, and start educating” but that the staff in day care and preschool need to be more experienced and educated themselves to provide high quality education.”

Participants also expressed concerns about overcrowded classrooms with only one teacher to address the diverse needs of students ranging from those who are gifted to those with special needs such as autism. “Overcrowded classes and one teacher, and it's like, drop everybody in, special need kids in with the regular kids... I sat in the classroom and watched, she can't deal with everything. She has certain kids that are smart and deals with them and the rest of them, push them to the side...You need to be there for all of them, not just one of them.” In addition, concerns were raised about children experiencing **trauma and related mental health issues** not having their needs adequately met – “So in impoverished communities, I think that the lack of needs for our children when it comes to special needs, when it comes to trauma, how am I going to tell a child to sit in an overcrowded classroom, and they are dealing with social and emotional issues all day?”

Participants also shared **that inequities in available resources and services** exist among impoverished schools and those in more affluent neighborhoods. While schools have experienced funding cuts for programs such as music and art, and staffing cuts for assistant principals and school nurses, more affluent schools are able to raise funds to support needed and desired services. One participant stated, “Access to educational tools and materials is lacking in our communities, more so than other communities. We just don't have the arts, the gym, the music programs, community programs. We do not have the same type of programs and access to the same kind of tools and materials that other

schools in other communities have... There is lack of funding across the whole board, but then you have parents that are working families that will raise \$300,000 so that if you don't have the music program, these parents are raising money for it."

Finally, the need for more diversity among teachers and other professionals was highlighted, "We really need to try and get more professional and more qualified people in our communities, in our schools and in our institutions that look like us, that our children can look up to as role models."

### **Health Issues**

**Behavioral health issues** discussed included the perceived rise in autism rates in children, exposure of adults and children to chronic stress and trauma, and lack of knowledge among the public about how to help someone with a mental health problem. Multiple participants voiced concerns about the number of children being diagnosed with autism. One participant shared – "I know so many people that had children with autism, but 20, 30 years ago, was it undiagnosed or is there something in our environment. Is something actually causing it? Where is this coming from? Like I feel like there's something we're not being told that's happening out there." In addition, concerns were raised about children experiencing trauma resulting from environmental exposures including drugs/violence, and related mental health issues being misdiagnosed and possibly overmedicated. "Children are traumatized, they're dealing with post-traumatic stress syndrome because their neighborhood had 52 homicides and they're tied to it in some way." Participants noted that services are needed to help youth and families deal with chronic stress and trauma. Several participants also spoke of needing information about how to assist someone with a mental health problem and the lack of community resources and services available. "My concern is the people out here with the mental health issues... no one knows how to handle it or we don't have a facility, you know they closed down...but it's just some place to go even if it is just to get them on their medications."

The discussion on **chronic disease** focused on the impact of the **built environment** on health, domestic violence and **access to health services**. A major concern was the impact of air quality on respiratory illness such as asthma and COPD. Participants spoke of the high rates of asthma among children and felt that vehicular traffic, pollution from factories/business in impoverished areas, and lack of green space contributed to poor air quality. One participant shared "we have a highway that passes through and a lot of air pollution and we don't have green space and the things in place that would fight against those things."

Obesity and heart disease were also identified as concerns tied to the built environment. **Access to healthy, affordable food** was highlighted as a problem, "It's cheaper for the family to buy a 25 cent bag of chips, but it's more expensive to buy a banana or some fruit or some veggies. I think that's always an issue." Participants also mentioned that the local market closed resulting in a "food desert. There was consensus among focus group participants that high crime rates related to addictions and homicide, and community appearance particularly trash and short-dumping, impact walkability and use of parks and playgrounds. While community clean-ups are frequent participants voiced frustration that these community beautification efforts can't be maintained due to animals and people ripping open bags, lack of garbage cans throughout the community, and ticketing for trash cans put in front or side yards of properties. In addition, focus group participants reported safety concerns related to street clean-ups – "the kids love doing it, but we had to stop the kids because they kept coming up with needles, they were finding needles all over the ground and I was so afraid that something would happen to them."

**Access to health services** is also a concern for the North Philadelphia East community. Encouraging people to see their health care provider rather than using the emergency department was discussed. Participants shared that more primary care providers are needed to reduce wait times for appointments and that hours should be extended to provide for individuals working multiple jobs. The perception is that there are few urgi-centers available and that they are expensive. One individual also shared that transitioning from pediatric to adult care for children with disabilities is a major issue. Participants also highlighted a need for information and education about health care, “We need to have somebody hold these hospitals, these health insurance companies accountable for what they are doing with the people they are supposed to be covering or supporting.” Other desired services include increased pharmacy delivery services; home visits by doctors for seniors, shut-ins and the disabled; and access to information about alternative healing resources and services.

Participants discussed the health issues of particular concern for the **children and youth** of their community. In addition to the need for mental health services for children and families dealing with chronic stress and trauma, participants expressed concerns about bullying, teen pregnancy, tobacco and drug use, poor nutrition and lack of affordable, safe opportunities for physical activity. The need for affordable afterschool programs was also mentioned. Considerable time was spent discussing social skills and the influence of social media and cell phone use on interpersonal and intergenerational communication. One participant shared, “they don’t know how to deal with conflict resolution, because they are so into what is going on in social media – they are ready to fight because of social media.”

Concerns about the health and social needs of **older adults** included elder abuse, support services and resources for grandparents raising their grandchildren, quality of home healthcare agencies’ employees, loneliness and social isolation, financial insecurity, and support for people dealing with loss and grief. Participants shared that elder abuse, especially by family and caregivers, was a concern. Several participants felt that family had relinquished caregiving responsibilities to home healthcare agencies due to competing responsibilities and that family members may be reluctant to report negligent caregiver employees to healthcare agencies. According to participants a lot of grandparents are “raising grandchildren because their parents are in prison or on drugs” and “grandparents need more support services because they can’t always take them (grandchildren) to the doctors for health and get the things they need.” Almost everyone agreed that loneliness and social isolation effect stress and mental health in older adults and that more resources are needed to support them and their caregivers. As one person shared – “there’s a lot of stuff that can spin out to stress and mental health issues because they’re feeling lonely, because they’re not able to express themselves because they have that old-time belief that there’s things that you just need to hold on and keep to yourself. Always in survival mode.” Participants noted that caregivers need information and skills to help older adults deal with their grief.

Finally, **financial concerns** can result in older adults going without needed health care. “Most of us in a certain age, the money is not enough to take care of monthly expenses, so we have to choose between food or medicine, and other items. So a lot of us go without a lot of the care that we need, because we are financially not prepared for older life.”

### **Priorities**

In North Philadelphia East, participants listed behavioral health, the physical environment, social determinants, the social environment, neighborhood safety and appearance, availability of services, and navigation and education as health priorities. Specifically, participants mentioned trauma and mental health as behavioral health priorities, air quality and dumping as physical environment priorities, housing as a social determinant, youth engagement and senior centers as social environment priorities,

crime as a neighborhood safety and appearance priority, and preventative medicine, urgent care, disability care, and women's health as availability of services priorities.

### **Solutions**

Focus group participants discussed solutions to address the health needs of their community. Participants highlighted the need for **health education and care management services**, especially related to parenting education, breastfeeding and the importance of immunizations. Care management services through the use of community health workers was shared as an effective strategy for helping people adhere to personalized chronic disease management discharge plans. Participants also suggested support services for parents, grandparents and caregivers such as parenting education, grief counseling and information about health and social services; mentoring for youth and role models in diverse professions and increased access to mental health services and information/education pertaining to caring for someone with a mental illness and for youth dealing with chronic exposure to trauma. Finding ways to engage youth, give them a voice and validation was seen as an important strategy to pursue.

## North Philadelphia - West

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the North Philadelphia West town hall meeting identified multiple strengths and assets in their community including accessibility, the built environment, community organizations, the people and history of the community. Public transportation (SEPTA) as well as access to major interstates and highways and the Indigo bike share program were all highlights of community accessibility. As one participant shared “location, location, location – we’ve got the best location ever.” Accessibility was also mentioned in relationship to nature – “we’ve got rivers, all kinds of creeks for the kids to explore – it’s beautiful.” While vacant land is often seen as problematic, this community also viewed it as an asset - “We have a lot of industrial buildings and vacant land that can be developed if carefully planned for that can help us address the needs of our neighborhood. If expansion is needed in whatever area whether it’s residential, commercial, health, we have the space to build or to rehab something to house like the trauma center or something like that, so that’s an asset.” Participants stressed that community organizations such as the Dell Music Center and religious institutions are strengths for the Strawberry Mansion community. Participants shared that people are still coming to church and that even those who move out of the neighborhood return to participate in religious activities.

Community residents and pride in the history of the neighborhood are also valued assets. Strawberry Mansion has a proud history of high home ownership, employment and the potential for upward mobility, and protesting. One participant stated, “People moved in because there were plenty of jobs that people could fit into no matter what their educational level was or their skill level.” Another shared that “Strawberry Mansion, it’s a lot of families, which makes a big difference in a community for everybody to get to know everybody and share the same positive and negative aspects of what goes on in our community.” An example of this community strength is that small food business owners, unlike supermarket chains, sometimes provide temporary credit to help parents buy food for their families. Finally, participants were proud of Strawberry Mansion’s historical reputation for social protest, especially civil rights protests. It is this strength of community that they hope to leverage to oppose gentrification and its negative outcomes in Strawberry Mansion.

#### Education

Participants shared concerns about the quality of the public schools and the potential closing of the local high school. One person stated that public schools have become “dumping grounds for returning children coming from institutions.” Quality early childhood education was also identified as needed – “We’ve got a lot of daycare centers and they’re just babysitters; they’re not developmental centers for kids.” Several participants shared that children may be labeled as having behavioral or learning problems when they actually need better access to speech, hearing and vision services as well as nutritious food. Early identification of these needs was highlighted as key to educational attainment of children. Several participants also discussed the expense of a college education and that college students from the community may be “homeless and hungry.” Given the high cost of education and the debt involved, several participants felt that institutions of higher learning could do more to support these students particularly with housing.

#### Health Issues

Substance use as a **behavioral health** concern was discussed as a major problem that has spanned generations. Crack and synthetic marijuana were specifically mentioned as were opiates. Gun violence and homicides in the community is traumatic for adults and children. One participant shared that

“Shootings, murders, stabbings, all kinds of violence has become nothing extraordinary to our children. You see some kind of upheaval and you see children running to it instead of running away from it because they’re attracted to that kind of commotion and violence. The whole mental health aspect of this.” Other participants discussed cultural implications related to utilization of mental health services and the need for education and information about behavioral health and available resources, “We as people really don’t think that we have mental health issues. We don’t believe in going to therapy and stuff like that so it’s hard to break through and make people understand that there’s nothing wrong with talking to a counselor.”

Participants noted several **chronic disease** health concerns that impact residents of North Philadelphia West. Diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol, heart disease, communicable diseases, and oral health were identified as health issues of concern, “High blood pressure, problems with cholesterol, all of those things that go along with poor eating are things that plague our community.” Older housing in disrepair was seen as a major risk factor for lead poisoning among children and high asthma rates. One participant said “with these slum lords that come into the area, people are paying all this money for rent and the conditions they’re living under is deplorable.” An aging population unable to afford needed repairs for their homes was also cited as a reason for asthma and poor indoor air quality.

Stress due to trauma as well as **homelessness**, lack of access to healthy affordable food and lack of opportunities for physical activity were also discussed as impacting the health of the North Philadelphia West community. One participant stated, “Parents come to me to get food, they just want to talk, and talk, and talk. They’ll be talking to me, telling me their problems, telling me this ...you can just see the wear of the stress, it’s killing them. They’re just tired and it’s so heartbreaking.” Participants also discussed tobacco, alcohol and other substance use and its impact on families, especially youth. “Kids brains are so preoccupied with being an adult and actually being the parent that they can’t be kids, they can’t go to school and learn because their mind is so mumbo-jumbo with worrying about if they’re going to have any lights when they come home or if there’s going to be any food on the table, you know what I mean? It’s like the roles have reversed.” Participants expressed concern that children are being compelled to take on adult responsibilities in order to survive.

Various features of the **built environment** that impact health were discussed at the focus group. Access to healthy affordable food and safe, affordable places for physical activity were also highlighted. Participants report that community residents need to “travel outside the neighborhood to be able to get good quality fruits and vegetables.” In addition, participants stressed that while schools teach about good nutrition practices, it’s difficult to follow these recommendations if you shop in corner stores and bodegas where all you see are chips, french fries, chicken wings and sugar beverages. One person put it this way – “If the school is telling you eat fruits and vegetables but you’re going in and all you see is potato chips, barbeque, sour cream and onion...or a rotten banana over here, so how do you make the connection between what you’re learning, whether it’s in school, or churches, or whatever you actually have access to in your neighborhoods.” Another person shared that “Save-a-Lot is not healthy because the food that they got in there is like the food that they sell on the corner in the summertime. We need something like a Whole Foods in order for our children and families to eat well...we want to buy foods that are good and wholesome for our families.” Several people indicated that food insecurity is an issue for the Strawberry Mansion community in particular, “The amount of hungriness in our community blows me away. When churches give out food you have people lining up like – it blows me away to see that.”



Participants acknowledged the need for better recreational and fitness facilities and indicated that **cost is a major barrier** to increasing physical activity. One participant expressed their frustration in the following way, “The thing about it is, because so many people are so attracted to our neighborhood because of all the poverty and all of the health conditions that we have, you’d think that somebody would donate a fitness center that’s free because everything that is here costs money and for real, everybody doesn’t have money. Some people may say maybe \$5 is not a lot; to some people \$5 is all they have and you’ve got to look at, can I feed my family with \$5 versus I know I need to do some exercise.”

The discussion concerning **access to health care services** focused on access to health care coverage, availability of timely appointments and the ability to obtain care from private health care practices in the community. Multiple participants experienced difficulty navigating the health insurance exchange website and shared that even with insurance you experienced long waits at city health centers and the VA – sometimes two to three months – to get an appointment. According to one individual, “There was a time where there was a lot of local doctors, but there’s not a lot of private doctors and private practice in the neighborhood anymore, so access to quality healthcare is a concern.”

In addition to **environmental exposures** to lead and asthma triggers (mold, pests), and nutritional needs resulting from food insecurity or access to healthier food choices, participants cited housing instability, sex trafficking, sexually transmitted infections and child abuse as major concerns. Participants reported a lack of affordable, structured activities, particularly during summer months. An individual in the focus group shared that, “five dollars or ten dollars may not seem like much to ask to pay for a child to go to summer camp, but it is a lot of money for some families... They’re in the street all summer, without good organized activities because those programs that used to be free from the department of recreation and that sort of thing, they’re no longer free.”

According to some participants **transient housing** is problematic particularly for **younger children** – “transiency is an issue because if you’re moving from house to house, you’re probably changing schools as well, so that folks may not be homeless but they may be more transient and that causes problems, especially at that critical age where you need to have stability.” **Homelessness** among youth may not be readily apparent according to focus group participants as youth tend to couch surf, “staying with friends one night and then staying with somebody else for another night.” Runaway youth, according to several participants, may be tied to child abuse, disagreement with parents, and may lead to sex trafficking. Several participants described youth who may be sex trafficking as “not fortunate enough to have somebody’s couch to hop on.”

**Health care affordability and access are major concerns for older adults** according to focus group participants. As older adults transfer to Medicare the need for supplemental insurance arises and often there is confusion about what is actually covered. Participants noted that older adults need “assistance with figuring out this whole insurance thing.” In addition, medication costs can result in cutting prescribed doses or not filling needed prescriptions. Participants highlighted that living on a fixed income often forces choices of whether to pay for food, rent, utilities, health insurance, or medications. A participant who also works with AARP shared, “They call us and they’re crying because they had to pay for their medical insurance – one lady said she was eating dog food because she didn’t have enough money. It’s not just one lady, a couple of them called and said they’re eating dog food because nobody would feed them and the woman on the phone is breaking my heart and telling me about the different organizations that they called and they were giving free food, but they needed to make choices between eating, paying their medical insurance, and their medications.” Older adults are also raising their

grandchildren according to several focus group participants, which is also straining their limited income. “They receive no kind of support, no kind of benefit, nothing...and now they have to use some of that income to raise two of their grandchildren.” Finally, participants voiced concerns about elder abuse particularly involving home healthcare staff.

### **Priorities**

In the North Philadelphia West town hall meeting, participants listed education, behavioral health, chronic disease, nutrition, social determinants, neighborhood safety and appearance, availability of services, insurance coverage and affordability, and quality of care as priorities. Specifically, residents mentioned youth and parent education, mental health and drug use as behavioral issues, obesity as a chronic disease priority, housing as the social determinants priority, and eye care as the availability of services issue.

### **Solutions**

Participants of the North Philadelphia West focus group noted several solutions to issues impacting their community. Participants discussed strategies to raise public awareness among older adults about food assistance programs such as Meals on Wheels and housing repair assistance. Older adults in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood could also benefit from more structured activities to “keep their mind and body sharp” such as Silver Sneakers. Participants also noted the importance of connecting seniors to digital and cell phone technology through training.

## Northwest Philadelphia

### Summary

#### Community Assests

Participants of the Northwest Philadelphia focus group noted several strengths and **assets that their community** provides, including access to transportation and a robust housing stock. There was general consensus that housing in Northwest Philadelphia is affordable, of good quality, and accessible. Participants stated that there are ample shops, religious organizations, a business district, recreation centers, but many of these assets are not fully utilized because of a lack of communication or advertising of services. “Sometimes we have this attitude that if we build it, people will come, right? It’s one thing to be aware, but then to actually be intentional about connecting people to the assets, I think that’s something that is missing.” Participants expressed a limited number of **employment** opportunities in the area, aside from few cashier and stocker positions at supermarkets.

#### Education

The “antiquated” **educational** system was cited as a concern by many community members who expressed that it currently lacks innovation (science and technology) and physical activity. Participants stated that while the private school system is thriving, the public-school system is not, especially with many public-school closures in the area. Participants thought that an **unmet educational need** in the community includes the lacking of job readiness programs for trade jobs like welding, plumbing, and electrical work. Finding a way to bolster the educational system in the area was a notable **priority** for focus group participants.

#### Health Issues

Participants felt that resources to address pressing **behavioral health needs** of the community are often too focused on Center City Philadelphia and should be spread amongst the larger community to provide medication, housing, and services that support people living with mental health needs. Participants also noted that the Northwest Philadelphia area is saturated with residential programs for people with mental health needs because the housing is still affordable. Loneliness leading to depression, and the perceived stigma regarding race and mental health were also raised as behavioral health issues in the community. “African Americans, in this particular culture, we don’t like to accept the fact that we have mental health issues. There’s a stigma with seeing the psychiatrist. Some people are just not comfortable speaking to someone else about their problems because with African Americans, there’s this trust factor.”

In terms of **quality and access to health care services**, including **behavioral health**, focus group participants recognized a lack of availability of quality mental health counselors and dental providers, and highlighted a desire for racial concordance between providers and the population. “I think it’s hard to find a good counselor. It’s hard to evaluate whether someone is good. Especially finding black males for black boys to talk to. I think that it’s not an easy system to navigate.” Participants added that despite there being many federally qualified health centers in the immediate area, wait times for services create access issues.

While some participants of the focus group noted improved access to mental health through the integration in primary care practices, the need for **more family-focused support services** was also raised by participants. In particular, participants voiced a need for services that teach families how to deescalate household conflict and support families with children that have behavioral and mental health

needs. “When you go to the primary care physicians they now do a psych assessment. I think more of that would help in the community, especially come from the hospitals. Once you get the information [from a psych assessment], what are you going to do with it as a university or a hospital? Can you put in like a small hub or satellite site in the community just for patients that suffer from mental illness?”

Obesity, specifically in children, was expressed as a **chronic disease** of concern in the Northwest Philadelphia community, with participants citing a lack of recreational activities and limited availability to healthy food as two possible reasons. A high saturation of fast food restaurants in the area (**environment**), but a limited access to healthy food echoed throughout the meeting. One participant expressed, “I do think that there is an assumption that in urban, poor, black communities or brown communities that people aren’t going to eat healthy, and so they saturate [the area] with what they think people are going to eat. If we can start making healthier food options convenient, we might see it move a little bit.” Another participant echoed that obesity is a disease [children] aren’t going to outgrow. “They’re diseases they will take with them to their graves. Because they started so young with bad habits.”

Several participants noted that despite having proximity to green space at Wissahickon Park, recreational activities for children is something that is **limited** in the community. One participant noted, “kids don’t have recreational experience. They’re just kind of hanging out or hanging in the house. That causes issues like behavioral issues as well as obesity.” Participants also alluded to a lack of communication from community-based organizations as a reason for the underutilization of services. “There’s a Police Athletic League center right around the corner from my house, but no one is actively coming to my street to recruit kids.”

### **Priorities**

In Northwest Philadelphia focus group participants listed education, behavioral health, nutrition, social determinants, the social environment, availability of services, and navigation and education as health priorities. Specifically, participants mentioned public education, anxiety as a behavioral health issue, food access as a nutrition issue, jobs and safe, affordable housing as a social determinants issue, youth recreation and community building as social environment issues, availability of mental health practitioners, and information about services as a navigation and education issue.

### **Solutions**

Solutions suggested by focus group participants included the need to have more community focused conversations to lessen the stigma around mental and behavioral health. Integrating services into the community was expressed as a solution to bring awareness to what resources are available. Participants thought that local community centers and religious organizations should offer lifestyle classes, such as cooking classes, to improve nutrition and healthy eating habits.

## Riverwards

### Summary

#### Community Assets

The Riverwards focus group participants highlighted multiple assets within their community, which include active participation and involvement of community members and availability of community organizations such as Impact Services, New Kensington Community Development Corporation (NKCDC), HACE, Somerset, Prevention Point and Penn Medicine's mobile unit health screenings. In addition, participants highlighted other community assets such as access to local businesses, corner stores, churches, schools, libraries, parks, events at community centers, urban gardening, health centers, and the presence of an opioid taskforce. Participants reported that community businesses support the community through coat drives and food donations at events. Participants shared that Riverwards is a family-oriented neighborhood and there is a willingness to get involved, noting neighborhood clean-ups and tree planting events as examples of residents invested in their community. "Everybody's really friendly in this neighborhood. Like you walk down the street and you see ten people that you know" and "Everybody here is pretty, like if you grow up around here pretty determined. So, everybody's like really determined in this neighborhood."

#### Education

Focus group participants discussed educational concerns in the Riverwards community including a rise of high school dropouts and a lack of employment opportunities and underemployment wages in the neighborhood. Additionally, participants noted a need for workforce and vocational skills, mentoring, tutoring, structured activities and parenting education.

#### Health Issues

Community members identified several health issues and concerns regarding behavioral health, chronic disease, environmental concerns, unhealthy behaviors, and nutrition. It is important to note that the Riverwards participants want to emphasize that they have other needs in the community that are overshadowed by the opioid epidemic. In 2017, community members administered a local Somerset neighborhood survey. Members shared the results during the focus group. Several social and healthcare issues were identified. Survey results included: 53.8% reporting a need for information on how to stretch money/food stamps; 56.4% reporting a need for employment/job training; 33.3% view depression as a health issue; 35.9% reporting a need for assistance with improving parenting skills; and 33.3% are concerned with child/elder abuse.

Participants addressed the **lack of access to fresh food and supermarkets**, and one member stated, "'Cause it's also something like I love the corner stores but it's hard getting fresh food there." In addition, members described numerous **environmental** health concerns such as the presence of lead, mold and asbestos, trash and human feces, dumping in the water system and sewers leading to water pollution, poor air quality, bedbugs, pests and more. One community member stated, "The less you care for your surroundings and all the other things follow; the rats and the ice. I can see that the stress of not having enough money to provide, it creates so much [stress]." In regards to the rise of construction in the neighborhood, a member cited the following specific concern, "They're not following the best practices that are in place, the very limited best practices that are in place right now. They are not spraying stuff down; they are not removing it properly. Sometimes they'll short dump where they'll just dump on another vacant property." Furthermore, community members expressed concern that the negative impacts of these poor environmental health factors may be contributing to cancer.

**Environmental** concerns were also raised in regards to the opioid epidemic. Focus group members

recognize the impact of drugs not only on people of the community but also that the environment which further impacts community residents. Vermin and pests are pervasive and participants shared beliefs that they are also tied to the growing drug issue in the Riverwards. “That’s where a lot of rats and all build-up with people that’s on drugs, they go and use drugs. Abandoned buildings is one of the major health concerns around here because it gives them a place to go and the rats are there.” Community members shared their appreciation for community organizations that come into the neighborhood to deliver services addressing substance use and other health issues, but emphasize the need for these organizations to “clean up” after they leave to prevent attracting pests and trash.

Community members expressed many social and health concerns for the **children, youth and young adults** of the Riverwards community such as trauma, mental health, hunger among children, physical and sexual abuse, high teenage pregnancy rates, suicide, and bullying due to peer pressure. Lead was a major concern raised by a community member because it has the ability to cause life-altering effects and children are the most vulnerable. This participant stated, “If you don’t remediate or find out where the sources are that it’s coming from and stop it, yeah, it can cause lifelong impacts.” Due to the opioid epidemic in the community, the children of the Riverwards community face needle exposure and the threat of being pricked due to improper disposal of used needles. Focus group participants shared their beliefs that there is a lack of parental care, guidance, and accountability in the home environment and emphasized the need for more attention on families with drug addiction and an increase of awareness of services and assistance navigating the behavioral health system. Members cited **safety issues in the neighborhood** due to sidewalks kept in poor condition and a lack of speed bumps to prevent speeding and reckless drivers. This prevents kids from being able to play outside and community members to safely walk through the neighborhood. In addition, community members expressed their concern for community safety when organizations assist individuals who are either high on drugs or “shoot up” outside the facility after seeking help by stating, “Because I walk my grandchildren past there and it’s horrible, and that’s a place where they go for treatment and the outside shouldn’t look like that.”

Community participants discussed the health issues of **older adults** in their community and expressed concern regarding social isolation, mental health, elder abuse, lack of affordable and safe housing, the need for neighborhood collaboration and social capital to look out for one another, transportation, access to technology and the internet, and the need to raise awareness to prevent being scammed. Transportation is perceived as a significant issue for older adults and one of the participants shared, “Well they don’t have transportation to get to the supermarket, to go to their doctor’s appointments, to go to social activities. Everybody does... They’re not educated about what is available.”

**Access to healthcare** and concerns regarding insurance coverage and the **cost of care** by participants of the Riverwards focus group. Participants raised concern over the high cost of health care even if you have insurance and limited coverage of insurance. They also expressed lack of timely, convenient appointments to see their physician. One member shared an example stating, “I was sick; had called into my primary doctor. They sent me to urgent care ‘cause they didn’t have any appointments coming in and that’s like the third time that’s happened when I’ve been sick.” Participants reported a lack of awareness of the services of Urgent Care centers that contributes to overutilization of the Emergency Department. Community members seek transparency of their healthcare benefits, an understanding of their insurance plan, and access to healthcare navigators.

### **Priorities**

In Riverwards, participants listed education, behavioral health, the physical environment, health behaviors, and nutrition as health priorities. Issues relating to the physical environment such as trash,

human feces, air pollution, lead, and rats stood out as a major issue in the community. In terms of education, participants mentioned the school library. When referring to behavioral health, participants listed opioids. For health behaviors, participants specified STIs. And for nutrition, participants noted fresh food access.

### **Solutions**

Potential solutions to the health issues impacting the Riverwards community that the focus group participants identified included safer bike and pedestrian lanes and sidewalks, clean and safe community spaces, youth education and job readiness and mentoring programs, and resource fairs and outreach materials for seniors/older adults and include information about scams that target seniors. Additionally, focus group participants suggested the need to raise public awareness about available substance use services, increased health insurance education and knowledge building regarding how to utilize public assistance benefits, and mobile health units designated for homeless and community residents to address chronic disease and provide health screenings.

## Sellersville

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the Sellersville community focus group discussed **accessibility** for individuals with physical disabilities being an asset to their community. In addition, they felt that their community catered to the older adult population and offered resources such as assisted living. Other assets included access to various **community organizations**, like churches, stores, movie theaters, and “good health systems, a lot of hospitals and urgent cares.” Good schools and proximity to open lands and parks were also mentioned. Participants highlighted several assets related to the people who make up the community. They stated that new community members get a “welcome neighbor envelope when you first move in, that's got coupons, and they tell you what's in the neighborhood.” They liked that the Sellersville community has low crime and generally feels safe, and that it is diverse and accepting of the diversity.

#### Health Issues

Focus group participants discussed the many limitations of **behavioral health** services in their community. Topics that came up were related to the limited number of behavioral health providers in their area and the wait times to see someone once they are finally able to schedule an appointment. There was some concern about one behavioral health organization having a high turn-over rate with their psychiatrists and participants felt there were also not enough resources to provide for psychiatric emergencies, such as inpatient services. Participants did discuss nurse care managers and a mobile crisis van as facilitators to accessing behavioral health and specialty wrap-around services.

Difficulties related to finding **behavioral health** providers specifically for children was mentioned, as well as early identification of behavioral health and developmental issues. Access to these services was mentioned as being problematic because “you have to have a pretty severe delay to be eligible for therapy when they're young” which they felt led to more problems because “you can see the warning signs and you just have to wait and watch your child fall farther and farther behind, so that you're playing catch up...”. Participants discussed how limited substance use disorder services have affected their families personally. They worried that in-patient detox facilities were not doing enough and illicit drug use behaviors continued after release.

Specialty care and urgent care access was seen as being available but with long waiting times for appointments and not offering medications on site, respectively. Insurance coverage acceptance was also seen as a barrier to accessing these services. Participants discussed difficulties with **navigating** online patient portals and knowing when and how to use them. The conversation covered the discomfort with using technology as a way to access healthcare information.

Focus group participants briefly talked about **chronic disease** and expressed concern for the increasing number of individuals with diabetes and the need for a diabetic education center with nutrition lectures and trainings. The availability of resources related to food insecurity was also discussed, but participants of the focus group meeting noted a lack of awareness of resources as well as a perception of stigma surrounding people who utilize them. Participants talked a lot about **limited resources** associated with transportation, especially for the elderly or disabled. They mentioned several available resources that do exist but that were either inefficient or people were not aware that they existed. Concern was also



expressed about limited, low-cost activities for children & youth to keep them active and healthy. The general feeling was that “we live in a society where you no longer can just kick your kid out the front door and be back by dinner (because) that’s how I grew up...”

### **Priorities**

The health priorities voiced by participants of the Sellersville focus group meeting included education, behavioral health, the physical environment, availability of services, navigation and education, quality of care, and vulnerable populations. Specifically, participants mentioned medical professions education, youth behavioral health, issues with the elderly and the physical environment caused by weather events, availability of drug, diabetes, and mental health treatment, education issues related to diabetes and heart care, quality emergency services, and food and clothing access for the homeless.

### **Solutions**

The Sellersville focus group participants discussed solutions regarding the perception of resource unawareness in their community. One participant suggested a free, quarterly newsletter that would be available to the public covering the various healthcare resources existing in the community.

## South Philadelphia, East of Broad

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the South Philly East of Broad Street focus group described multiple strengths and **assets of their community** including transportation, walkability, and the recent movement to repurpose vacant lots into green spaces. A variety shops and restaurants were also notable assets. Friendly neighbors, a diverse composition of community members, and friendly, caring neighbors were a highlight for many community members. However, participants stated that improvements are beginning to plateau, and said more investment is needed to keep improving on things such as vacant lots, community centers, roads, and an affordable housing stock.

#### Education

The **quality of education** in the area was of notable concern for many focus group attendees. “[Education] is a really serious health issue because if someone is in poverty, they’ll stay in poverty forever without access to a good education system.” Some participants attributed the issue of **unmet educational needs** to the persistent gentrification in the area. “There’s so much new construction and with a 10-year tax abatement, people are moving into the neighborhood and they’re not contributing to the school system.” Other participants expressed frustration with the lottery system that allows for admittance to some public schools, stating that success can be determined by socioeconomic status and race, and that affordable alternatives are limited.

#### Health Issues

Despite having access to a main artery of public transportation, the Broad Street Line, participants expressed **accessibility** issues with other modes of public transportation, such as busses and trolleys, specifically due to tricky navigation and unreliable bus schedules. Others cited these issues are due to terrible road conditions that causes bus routes to be rerouted. As a result of limited transportation options, participants stated that a lack of accessibility to health food sources persists. Participants thought that the food in their community is expensive and of low quality, and that there are few healthy options in a walking distance that do not require taking multiple lines of public transportation to reach.

Participants mentioned several concerns and areas of improvement regarding their **built environment** including light pollution from all of the businesses along the streets in the neighborhood, poor air quality from all of the traffic, and unsafe sidewalks for pedestrians. Several participants mentioned wanting protected bike lanes and universal regulations/education for bicyclists and drivers. “The infrastructure that does exist for bikes is poorly maintained. The bike lanes are almost invisible. I used to bike to work and I stopped because I was concerned about getting hurt and had too many close calls.” Participants also expressed that despite having ample green spaces in the community, parks and playgrounds often feel segregated by race and ethnicity, an issue many participants say has been apparent for decades. Other **environmental and chronic health issues** included asthma, lung and heart disease, and poor sleep quality. In addition, several participants were concerned about the recent influx of infectious disease outbreaks due to a lack of vaccination among community members.

When asked what community need was due to **limited resources**, participants mentioned that the housing stock is old and the quality is diminishing, leading to some health-related issues. The affordability of housing also a concern, as many houses that have been in families for generations are being flipped and resold for unaffordable prices.

Although participants generally stated feeling safe in the area, they did mention **neighborhood appearance** as a pain point, specifically regarding the amount of litter and trash along the streets and green spaces. Focus group attendees related the issue to unsafe conditions for children playing in the streets or pedestrians walking on the sidewalk. “It’s broken glass, hygiene products, food waste, food containers, drug paraphernalia, animal waste. And of course, that’s running off and getting into the whole region’s water supply. It creates an unhealthy environment.”

While focus group participants noted ample availability to physical health care services, including primary care, specialty care and pharmacies, the **limited access to behavioral health care** was one of the most significant concerns at the focus group. Participants stated that the community is suffering from chronic stress due to community violence, death, poverty, and the opioid crisis. “There are very few behavioral health outpatient providers for kids in this region, or for adults to manage serious behavioral health issues, and probably most notably, anxiety and depression.” This was of **particular concern for children**, with participants saying, “they [children] may be seeing their parents going through addiction. Making sure that kids have access not only to primary care and physician health providers, but really making sure that there is behavioral health access.” On the topic of opioid addiction, participants were concerned that the shame and bias that go along with addiction leads to an unwillingness to bring residential rehabilitation programs to the community, which participants cited was an **unmet health need**. Additionally, they want to see an increase in access to medication assisted treatment.

A few participants noted issues with **insurance coverage and affordability**, in part, due to the fact that many Philadelphians work in New Jersey and Delaware, so employer-sponsored health insurance plans don’t often cover many services in the local community where they reside and, if they do, the services are typically out-of-network and more expensive to receive. Participants stated that this weighs on their decision to seek care from local institutions, and wish for more locally accessible and affordable options, like urgent care centers. Some noted improvements and expansion through the Affordable Care Act as ways that they were able to access insurance.

### **Priorities**

In South Philadelphia, East of Broad, participants mentioned education, behavioral health, physical environment, health behaviors, and neighborhood safety and affordability as health priorities. Specifically, participants listed the need for health education as an educational priority, behavioral health in children and adolescents, including drug addiction, vaccines as a health behaviors issue, and access to safe and clean green spaces as a neighborhood issue.

### **Solutions**

Participants of the South Philadelphia, East of Broad focus group highlighted the need to invest in high quality educational initiatives as a solution to many of the issues facing their community. One participant stated, “I think if we can really use the soda tax money to invest in high quality, universal pre-k for the city, that would really change the game. I think that the Community Schools Initiative, really expanding that would be incredible.” Participants also noted the need for the City to prioritize investing in education for its citizens rather than giving tax breaks, stating, “school funding is the huge crisis and we have to end this 10-year tax abatement. It’s ridiculous. It is just a giveaway to developers, and so we need people who are here and really investing in our city, in the future of our city.” Solutions to the behavioral health needs and opioid crisis were also highlighted by participants including community health workers, Narcan distribution, expanded access to medication assisted treatment, and increased community education about existing community resources. Finally, community participants

noted that neighborhood clean-ups would go a long way to address social isolation and environmental concerns.

## South Philadelphia, West of Broad

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the South Philadelphia, West of Broad Street focus group described multiple strengths and assets of their community including transportation, green space, and a strong bond with neighbors. One member expressed, “There’s a sense of community, sense of place and family. People love taking care of each other.” However, despite having access to these spaces, participants felt that they are not inclusive or accessible for everyone in the community, primarily due to “racial policies and traditions.”

#### Education

Focus group participants outlined several concerns with the **education** system. Diminishing resources at local public schools have eliminated positions for school nurses and social workers, and have created inadequate pay disparities between various teacher positions. Attendees want to see more opportunities for school-based programs to provide mentorship to students, particularly young black male students. Participants urged that it is essential for mentors to be diverse so that students can relate to them.

#### Health Needs

Participants were concerned with the emotional and **mental health** of their community. “I think hopelessness is a huge health problem in this area. How are you supposed to care about anything when there’s so much neglect from so many services and institutions and from the City. These people haven’t been listening for a long time.” Parents noted that children, often grieving death and violence in their communities, are “sad, frustrated, and depressed” but don’t have the support systems in place to help them cope so they often become “violent because they are angry.” Other community members recounted examples of bullying and tense student-teacher relationships in schools that leads to depression. “Maybe [teachers] are frustrated because they don’t have the funding to get the tools and resources needed to educate the children.”

Children and adolescents were identified as a **vulnerable population** in need of great support. Of notable mention, basic health care (mental and physical) for children, and prenatal care for young women. “When I think of basic things that children should get, I’m thinking of things at school and at home. We have kids being raped. We have kids pregnant. We have kids being killed. Basic school things or vision, hearing, they don’t even do stuff like that anymore. Nobody is talking to the kids about mental health. Nobody is talking to children about what they’re feeling mentally. Nobody is talking to children about what’s bothering them. So when I hear the word, basic health care, it really frustrates me because it’s like, how basic?”

Issues with wide-spread **gentrification** in the neighborhood was expressed by many focus group participants. Rising costs of housing and threats of landlord’s selling properties that some community members have occupied for multiple generations was noted as a major stressor. “I think the problem with affordable housing is that the average person in Grays Ferry is not going to make that income for affordable housing. It is based off of not Philadelphia, but the surrounding counties.” **Accessibility of housing** is exacerbated by a crumbling infrastructure in the existing stock, mold, and indoor air quality issues that cause asthma.

**Limited assets**, in terms of economic opportunity, was also of concern. Participants expressed that due to the lack of financial institutions, banks, ATMS, and credit unions, the community “stays poor.” Participants want more economic opportunity for people to have meaningful work with dignity, and pipelines for entrepreneurs in the neighborhood to become small business owners.

A mistrust with local institutions and organizations was widely discussed at the focus group. Participants stated knowing, second-hand, of programs that the University of Pennsylvania offers but expressed that little communication is shared with the surrounding neighborhoods. This was also a concern for the Pennovation Center, which participants said they knew little about or understood what benefit it had for the community or how they could be involved. One member suggested a SEPTA bus that connects the neighborhood directly to Penn as a solution.

Participants expressed a desire for local institutions to invest more in the local youth. “There may be a world-renowned doctor right here in Grays Ferry, but nobody knows about it. They [Penn] are not investing in them. We can’t afford to send our children to the programs that are offered that cost \$500 or \$600. Even though it would be very beneficial to our children.”

Participants expressed concerns that public health initiatives in the community, like Healthy Corridors, have highlighted the **environmental** stressors on health in the Grays Ferry area, specifically high rates of asthma and cancer compared to other areas in Philadelphia. Participants drilled down to air quality as a specific concern due to proximity to the interstate, a waste management refinery, and an oil refinery. “The Philadelphia Energy Solutions Oil refinery is poisoning us to a much larger degree than anywhere else in the city in terms of cancer and respiratory illness. But people are so disempowered by having to deal with all of these stressors and violence, worry about losing their homes, not having access to basic care: food, water, shelter, whatever. There is no time or space to take on the kid of fight [with the energy company] where there’s long-term health effects.”

### **Priorities**

Participants in South Philly West of Broad mentioned education, behavioral health, chronic disease, the physical environment, health behaviors, social determinants, neighborhood safety and appearance, availability of services, insurance coverage and affordability, navigation and education, and vulnerable populations as health priorities in their community. Behavioral health stood out as a prominent idea. Specifically, participants noted youth, trauma, opioids, drug addiction, and stress as behavioral health issues. Chronic disease issues included congestive heart failure, asthma, and cardiovascular health. The physical environment issues were specified as air pollution. The health behavior issues included teen pregnancy. Racism, equality, and gentrification were listed as social determinants that affect the community. In terms of neighborhood safety and appearance, participants mentioned safety, guns, and green space for exercise and relaxation. Participants listed access to substance abuse treatment as a priority, and noted the vulnerable population of non-English speakers.

### **Solutions**

Participants stated that until they can become self-sustaining, pilot programs in the community require investment. “We are looking for \$50,000. We are looking for a building. We are looking for three social workers. We are looking for a monthly public health meeting and information sessions. A place where people without insurance, who can’t go to the hospitals, can come to get medical supplies and care. And not a mobile unit. Because at the end of the day they drive a way. It can be something on a more consistent basis, maybe once a month come out and do flu shots, blood pressure screenings, things like

that. Basic needs like dental and vision.” Participants also highlighted the success of the Penn Alexander School and suggested that something similar be done with schools in the Grays Ferry area.

Participants would like to see a partnership with local institutions, like Penn, to tackle air pollution, trash, and sanitation issues in the community. “If Penn is concerned about health, they need to get behind us in terms of trying to take down pollution-causing companies and structures in the city. That’s a fight that many of us in this community are starting to take on, but we need all the help we can get from things like that.”

## Southwest Philadelphia

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the Southwest Philadelphia focus group noted several strengths and **assets that their community** provides, specifically ample green space (**built environment**) at Bartram's Garden's and the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, walkability, strong community partners, and caring neighbors. Participants mentioned that public transportation is available in the community, but that recent updates to the Septa Key card have made transferring lines of transit very expensive, and hard to maintain for people who do not have access to the internet. "It can be pricey to own a car and now the [SEPTA] card fare has made it difficult for people to catch public transit."

Community members who participated in the focus group meeting see transitional housing, specifically for women with children who are experiencing homelessness and employment opportunities, as **limited assets** in their community. Lack of financial health, due to unlivable minimum wages, rising costs of living and utilities and costs of medical care, were triggers of family unit stress by many participants at the meeting "If you're not eating, if you can't make ends meet, then you're definitely going to be stressed, and you're not going to have the patience to deal with life in a healthy way." Participants expressed satisfaction with the services provided by several **community organizations**, including the Southwest Community Development Corporation whose list of services include things such as housing assistance and career development programs. Additionally, the Neighborhood Advisory Subcommittee have taken strides to move neighbors from relying on payday loan services to establishing bank accounts, and has a campaign to eliminate dumping in their community. Support for the Southwest community is also shown through close relationships with police officers, small businesses, like corner stores, and with local libraries. Participants mentioned that libraries also offer a cadre of helpful services like job fairs, community events, moving nights, volunteer opportunities, tax preparation services, and computer skills classes, among others.

#### Education

**Unmet educational needs** echoed widely throughout the meeting, including a lack of resources and programming for adults with cognitive delays who have aged out of school-based programs. Participants mentioned recent cuts to programs and schools including school nurses and social workers. "You have students that take medication, and there is no health professional on-site to help administer that. So, you have regular teachers or the receptionist that giving out medication." "That's one reason I homeschool my eight-year-old, because he has asthma, and he takes treatment every day. I don't feel comfortable sending him to school. I prefer to keep my son alive by homeschooling."

#### Health Issues

Focus group attendees cited behavioral health, substance use, suicide, depression, anxiety; trauma, caused by high murder rates in the community; and, obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, as **health issues** facing their community. For children (**special population**), participants specifically were concerned with childhood diabetes and asthma, **environmental** health issues like lead exposure and air pollution in schools and at home, and behavioral health issues such as anxiety and chronic stress. **Behavioral health concerns** including substance use (both drugs and alcohol), prescription drug misuse, as well as climbing rates of suicide were also of concern for the adult population in the community. "People are more depressed, they're more oppressed, and they're not getting help. They're not talking through frustrations and anxiety." Participants also attributed behavioral health concerns to violence and murder in the community.



Access to exercise options and high-quality, affordable food was expressed as limited resources in the community that may be leading to high rates of **chronic diseases** like hypertension, obesity, and diabetes. “These resources aren’t currently there, but if they were available, people would definitely use them.” When asked about the **quality and access to health services**, participants mentioned a limited availability of affordable dental care, and mental health and substance use services in the local community. Affordability concerns were attributed to poor **insurance coverage** for such services, particularly for participants churning on and off Medicaid, prescription drug costs, and costs of deductibles. “Some of these federal insurance programs have people second guessing, is this really an emergency? Because I don’t have the \$100 to pay my deductible, so do I really need to go? If it turns out you do need to go and you don’t, you wind up with more problems.” Focus group participants mentioned similar concerns when it comes to specialty care services, particularly issues with unaffordable copays, navigating the referral process, and costs of prescriptions.

### **Priorities**

In Southwest Philadelphia, focus group participants listed behavioral health, the physical environment, nutrition, neighborhood safety and appearance, availability of and navigation of health services, and insurance coverage and affordability as health priorities. Many participants mentioned availability of services and insurance coverage and affordability. Of note were priorities related to gun violence in their community including traumatic brain injury services, spine injuries, and counseling support for gunshot victims. In terms of behavioral health, participants mentioned ideas such as mental health, trauma/PTSD, and substance abuse. For the physical environment, specifics included air quality and presence of a refinery. In terms of neighborhood safety and appearance, participants noted guns and cleanliness. In terms of availability of services, participants specified preventative medicine, health for homeless, substance abuse, women and children’s health, dental care, and mental health.

### **Solutions**

**Solutions** that were suggested by focus group participants included: increased availability of after school programs; health services for women and children; parenting classes; physical activity options, healthy food options, and other ways to prevent chronic disease through nutrition and exercise; improved communication and education on diabetes and obesity; as well as better availability of affordable dental, behavioral health, and substance use services.

## West Chester

### Summary

#### Community Assets

The participants of the West Chester focus group highlighted community assets such as availability of parks and recreation areas as well as high quality education for youth. Several participants also discussed the benefits of seeking care at one of the new urgent care centers that have recently opened up in the area. They felt that the doctors at these care centers, as compared to their usual doctor, spent more quality time with them and didn't rush through appointments as much. One stated, "You feel as though they're looking after you, they're not just out for the money part, they are helping you because you're going there because you're sick and you're telling them, so they're going to listen and help you. I know my doctor get sick of me."

#### Health Issues

West Chester focus group participants discussed the **behavioral health** and substance use needs of their community with several participants reported attending funerals for peers as a result of opioid drug overdoses. Participants noted that lifestyle choices and stressors are not only affecting their peers but people of all ages, with vaping among local youth noted as a particular concern.

A general theme emerged around challenges faced when **navigating health systems** as a **senior citizen**, specifically in terms of awareness of health options, self-advocacy, and having the necessary knowledge to ensure quality and affordability of health services. Participants reported a desire for more effective advertisements on costs of medications, available discounts for medications and procedures, as well as up-front information about procedural costs prior to any procedure. One suggested that having "price listings for medical procedures" would be helpful in order to avoid getting the bill after the fact and then realizing "oh, this wasn't covered." There was a reported desire for "full financial disclosure" ahead of time as well as explicitly described alternative options if the offered service was too expensive.

Focus group participants also voiced concern regarding lack of understanding or preparation to manage **chronic diseases** and **navigate health care systems**. Several participants provided personal examples of when they had been prescribed an expensive medication by their doctor and were unaware of cheaper versions that were available. One member noted, "I think a lot of folks who have made it to the senior population are not used to questioning authority or asking [questions]. If the doctor says, 'take the drug that costs \$20,000 a month', well that must be the drug I have to take, [as opposed to saying] 'I can't afford this, isn't there something else I can do?'" Participants expressed concern that community members are not well equipped to navigate the complex health care system. One participant is a health care worker and noted that they are constantly astonished at how many people really lack a clear understanding of the Medicare system. They stated, "I feel inadequate to counsel them sometimes, because it is so complex. I would say that the ease of understanding our own healthcare in this country for seniors is lacking." Overall, there was a large desire for education and explicit training on how to effectively navigate healthcare systems while self-advocating.

Barriers to **access to quality** providers and health care services was discussed by participants, citing that most were located in Philadelphia, which is further away and harder to get to. There was also discussion amongst the group that they often received recommendations for providers through discussion with peers or caregivers. Additionally, participants described **a lack of supply and financial constraints** as a

barrier to hiring in-home caretakers for **seniors** in the community. Without affordable options, many are having to move to nursing homes or assisted living communities.

Limited forms of **transportation, affordable housing, and financial resources** were expressed by participants who described issues related to available, affordable, and timely forms of transportation. Despite several participants utilizing Rover Community Transport as a transportation service, when it comes to traveling to a doctor's appointment on time, participants reported that the service is not reliable for timing. Knowledge gaps and a lack of comfort with technology were highlighted as specific transportation barriers; a participant stated that "the senior population isn't really familiar" or "comfortable" with utilizing ride share platforms as an alternative, which leave people in a bind when Rover is not the most reliable option.

Adequate and affordable in-home care can be hard to come by, which also directly ties into the issue of local, **affordable housing**. Participants expressed that returning to the work force after retirement is not always an option for seniors and, if it is an option, there are a lack of well-paying jobs in the area to afford cost of living expense. Several described that **gentrification** has led to challenges for many long-term residents of the area, especially when it comes to moving within the community, as new housing developments are unaffordable. With a scarcity of senior living centers, price of real estate and moving, along with the expense of in-home care, individuals in the community are feeling stuck and unsure about next steps.

Participants reported health-related concerns for both youth and older adults. For **older adults**, there was agreement amongst participants of an existing **stigma** against asking for help as well as participating or living in a senior center. Having a healthy social life was mentioned as a priority for several participants, however, they felt that outsiders to the community may be unlikely to attend events because they are geared towards seniors. Student loan debt was discussed as a prevalent and underlying concern for **young adults**. Participants described that recent college graduates frequently need to move home because they cannot afford to live on their own, which can hinder or delay retirement for older adults. Additionally, there were concerns voiced surrounding the amount of time **youth** spend on technology as opposed to other extracurricular activities. Accessible and affordable afterschool programs would provide additional supervision and structure for younger children, which could allow other family members, such as older siblings, to seek additional sources of income to help support the family.

### Priorities

The health priorities raised by participants of the West Chester community focus group included the physical environment, social determinants, availability of services, insurance coverage and affordability, navigation and education, and quality of care. Specifically, participants mentioned water quality as a physical environment priority, family structure, taxes on the elderly, and affordable housing as a social determinant, the need for senior centers and child care as availability of services priorities, and prescriptions as an insurance coverage and affordability priority.

### Solutions

Focus group participants had many ideas for solutions to the health needs of their community. Regarding the issue of health education and ability to self-advocate, participants wanted **more learning opportunities on skills for navigating health systems**, specifically regarding decision making around cost-effective health care decisions and course of treatment options. **Additional senior housing** as well as communal housing options were offered as potential solutions to affordable housing issues. One

participant contributed the personal example of collaborative senior housing within a college campus or near a school, which would allow for a more collaborative and mutually beneficial community. He/she described, “On the college campus [where my son went], they had mixed housing for seniors and college students, which worked out beautifully because the seniors would help the college students with homework or other things they might need, and the college students could do odd jobs for the seniors, like run to the grocery store, pick up a prescription.” Not only would this provide in-home services for the elders, but it could also be transformed into more **intergenerational housing** where the elders could provide afterschool childcare to support the younger generation while the younger generation could assist with household chores or errands for the elders. Participants remarked on the benefits of intergenerational or communal living and how it increases built-in supports, community connectedness, and “cross-generational knowledge sharing.” To address stigma surrounding events being held at senior activity centers, participants suggested shifting the external communications and advertisements to engage the community more broadly. This, along with the housing ideas previously outlined, could **increase the sense of community** amongst peers and will help improve the community’s health and social support networks.

Participants also raised tax deductions or reimbursements for family members serving as in-home caretakers as a solution to senior care as it could alleviate the financial burden placed on elders and insurance companies to fund in-home care and could supplement the familial caretaker’s income and time.

## West Philadelphia

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the West Philadelphia community focus group described multiple strengths and assets of their community including accessibility, the network of community organizations and anchor institutions, as well as the diversity of religious beliefs and institutions. Participants described several examples of **accessibility** as a community asset, including: community-based health care, walkability, and proximity to public transportation. Participants stated that, in particular, Sayre Health Center is great for people who “don’t have insurance,” and the CHOP Karabots Center is helpful because people don’t have to “travel outside of the neighborhood” to get care for their children. One community member stated, “One thing I love about living in the city is the walkability. There are businesses that are close enough to walk to, and you run into your neighbors along the way.”

Focus group participants described several **community organizations** as valuable assets to the West Philadelphia community. These services included, Oak Tree Health Service, Sayre Health Center, the CHOP Karabots Pediatric Care Center, a robust faith-based community, youth programs, and services for veterans, among others. Additionally, anchor institutions were described as a positive part of the community. One participant described a strengthened relationship with the local colleges in the neighborhood. “I grew up in 19104 in the 60s and 70s and we didn’t always have a good relationship with the college,” citing back then, colleges were “trying to push us out and there was no meeting, there was no cooperation, but now we have a very good working relationship and they have a lot of programs in our neighborhood and our community. That’s been very good.” Religious organizations were described as a part of the richness of the West Philadelphia community. Participants talked about the importance of the diverse religious community in West Philadelphia and the ability for different religious institutions to “coexist” together, adding that these institutions are able to “touch people on the ground, and understand what’s happening and get a message out, get people excited about things that are happening,” calling them, “a connecting pulse.”

#### Education

Although participants described the convenience of schools being close in the neighborhood, many focus group participants expressed major concerns regarding the **quality of education and unmet need** of students, teachers and educational infrastructure in the community and Philadelphia at large. Concerns included the physical condition of schools, particularly the bathrooms, cafeterias, and classrooms.

“We have so many high school students who are in 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade who are literally reading at a third grade level. Literacy is a huge problem, our high school kids are in trouble.” Several participants echoed similar sentiments and cited the lack of teachers, absences of teachers, and influx of substitutes as a cause. “I have been told in public school, we don’t have enough teachers because of *No Child Left Behind*. Meaning if a child is in the fourth grade, [and] they’re on the second grade level, you are supposed to give them extra to catch them up to where he needs to be. I’ve been told that we just don’t have enough teachers to do that.”

Participants described a struggle to partner with schools and teachers to meet the behavioral needs of their children, particularly around disciplining students. Parents expressed frustration with a perceived inability of schools to address student behavior and learning needs, especially when behavior problems

distract other students from learning. Participants described a more ideal partnership as being one that includes all parties (principal, parent, student, and teacher) at the table to resolve problems.

### Health Issues

Community members who participated in the focus group described many health issues of concern in their West Philadelphia neighborhoods including overprescribing and diagnosis of ADD/ADHD, opioid use, domestic violence, and sexually transmitted diseases. Participants expressed the benefit of having strong relationships with their neighbors as a way to effectively communicate and manage their **behavioral and mental health needs**, particularly depression. However, they stated that this is not the same for the younger generation. “They don’t have the security here [that] we used to have back in the day. The majority of them are depressed because of the type of living that some of them have”. Several Participants spoke up about the ramifications of trauma in the community, particularly as it relates to witnessing violence and chronic stress due to issues such as poverty.

Participants highlighted barriers to accessing behavioral and mental health including the cost of care, and the stigma associated with the diagnosis of a behavioral health need. The burden of copays, providers and hospitals that do not accepting certain types of insurance plans, and trouble navigating health care systems (finding a provider, getting an appointment, transportation, health literacy) were all described as contributing to a negative perception of the quality and access of health care in the community. Participants also discussed the lack of trust with health care, from mistrust with insurance companies, health care systems, and providers. Some participants related lack of trust to stigma, communication issues, lack of services or decreased quality of services, or to the ramifications of subsequent actions associated with a behavioral health diagnosis such as an Individualized Education Program or overprescribing for medication to manage symptoms like ADHD.

Pregnant and postpartum women were noted as a particularly **vulnerable** population in West Philadelphia, particularly due to the high rates of maternal mortality, which members noted also creates issues with mental health and substance abuse.

**Nutrition** and access to healthy food was described as another barrier to health in the West Philadelphia community, primarily because of the expense of fresh fruit and limitations of refrigeration, storage, and shelf life that limits corner stores’ desire to carry healthy food.

STIs in the younger generation, as well as strokes, cancer, sleeping disorders and sickle cell were notable **chronic conditions** mentioned by the group.

Participants described many features of the built environment that create barriers to health in their community. **Limited resources** were described as a barrier to quality green spaces for community dwellers to play and enjoy, and affordable housing with adequate utilities such as plumbing and heat were highlighted as pressing issues in West Philadelphia. Affordable housing and lack of shelters were cited as a reason for increased homelessness in the community. Additionally, community members would like to see reentry programs for returning citizens as it is something that has been limited over the years.

### Priorities

The health priorities in West Philadelphia included education, behavioral health, chronic disease, health behaviors, nutrition, social determinants, neighborhood safety and appearance, availability of services, and insurance and affordability. Priorities related to behavioral health including emotional health,

mental health, stress, depression, trauma, and substance abuse emerged as shared among many people. Additionally, participants specifically mentioned health, youth and elder education as key components of the education priority. Congestive heart failure and diabetes were listed as chronic disease priorities. Exercise was a health behaviors priority. Housing and socioeconomic status were social determinant priorities. Guns, violence, and safe outdoor spaces were neighborhood safety and appearance priorities. Issues with availability of services included mental health and maternal health.

### **Solutions**

Solutions that were cited by focus group participants included services such as community health workers that would be helpful for patients having trouble navigating complex health and social needs, particularly when it comes to scheduling appointments, getting access to support services, and medication management. In addition, some participants discussed the need for health care providers to receive training around cultural competencies and implicit bias to be a solution to some of the problems facing West Philadelphia. Furthermore, participants noted a desire for organizations to evaluate processes and systems after providers are trained.

In addition, participants expressed strong interest in being included in conversations with health care systems moving forward, not just during the community health needs assessment cycle. “The value of our voices... it’s thinking about how you keep the continuous feedback loop. How do you take what people are saying, what they need on the group and actually create programs?” Those programs included partnerships around housing and nutrition, which members cited was at the “crux” of many issues. “Food prescriptions or like nutrition as a prescription, whatever those programs are called. That’s something that I’d love to see and I think could be beneficial to spread amongst the community.” Others suggested that corner stores should work with architects to redesign their space to accommodate the infrastructure needed to carry more nutritious food.

## Willow Grove

### Summary

#### Community Assets

Participants of the Willow Grove focus group described several strengths and assets of their community including accessibility, reliability of environmental services, availability of community resources, and high-quality education within the districts. Participants described the transportation-related benefits of living in this area, including **accessibility** to major highways and living within walking distance of various train stations that connect to regional rail lines with widespread destinations. “You can really walk to the train and get anywhere in the world, because you get all the regional rail lines, get to the airport, and fly anywhere.” Regarding the **built environment**, a participant reported appreciation for the consistent and reliable clearing of snow and trash within their neighborhood, “The snow is taken care of very quickly, and that’s important. The trash seems to be picked up on time, all the time.”

Several participants commented on the closeness and availability of “safe, clean, and affordable” **community organizations**, resources, and activities within close proximity to home. These included malls, banks, culturally diverse restaurants, social services, and health clinics. Participants felt they could rely on the The Annex Courthouse or meetings held by the Abington Township Police Department for sources of community-based resources and information.

#### Education

Participants described the school districts and quality of **education** as being “some of the best in the state”. This was validated by the perspective of participants who previously experienced other local school districts and were able to compare the quality of education between the two areas. Additionally, one participant complimented the availability of extracurricular activities, including the music and theater programs.

#### Health Issues

Participants discussed many health issues of concern including opioids, limited resources to address chronic conditions, and childhood obesity. Despite many participants recognizing that “the opioid situation is at epidemic levels,” there was variability in perspectives in terms of specific knowledge on the local pervasiveness of this issue. One participant also remarked that within their church community of 1,400 members, they knew of no one who had experienced a crisis or issue related to opioid usage, despite the known widespread epidemic that they “hear on the news”. However, another focus group participant remarked that “there isn’t a single church that [he/she] volunteers at that hasn’t lost somebody to heroin or an opioid overdose.” Despite there being a difference regarding personal experience related to the **opioid epidemic**, all participants seemed to be aware of its nationwide presence.

One participant is a practicing social worker who provides health and nutritional information to elder patients with varying **chronic conditions**, such as diabetes, mobility issues, and heart conditions. This individual expressed facing challenges related to knowledge of and access to other community-based services that he/she could refer patients to for additional care, “I don’t feel that there’s readily available and accessible resources to me, as a provider.” Participants reported that **limited resources** and lack of knowledge of other hospital programs, creates challenges when trying to address the diverse and often interdisciplinary needs of community members.



**Childhood obesity and access to nutritious foods** were characterized as needing additional attention and resources. Despite the several programs and efforts devoted towards providing kids with school lunches and families with daily meals, there are still challenges when it comes to eligibility for services. A participant stated, “it’s a little bit frustrating not being able to use those resources that we should be able to get.”

Widespread misconception of the community’s financial makeup and how that affects availability and allocation of resources within the Willow Grove area, was a reoccurring theme. Homelessness, food insecurity, and unavailability of affordable and high-quality healthcare were continuously depicted as “not obvious” and thereby not receiving the same levels of funding or attention as compared to other suburbs where these concerns are “very visible”.

Participants commented on knowing that resources exist but that sometimes it is hard to know “where to start” as well as who qualifies to access these resources. **Affordable housing** and issues related to **homelessness** were described in depth. Several participants commented on housing programs such as Section 8 Voucher, Your Way Home, and The Ambler Interfaith, however, there were remarks that these programs still result in only being able to “stay for a month” or that “there’s a bunch of people that don’t quite make enough money to be able to afford affordable housing.” Primarily, these individuals seem to be single, working moms who are “employed, making money, but **not enough money to be financially independent.**” A participant described their involvement in the area’s “homeless count” and found that many of the local homeless individuals were “not noticeable” to outsiders. Several participants reflected on their lack of awareness because, based on appearance, everyone in the area seems to be “doing pretty well; they eat, nobody looks skinny and everybody is going in a house at night, because I don’t see them out on the street”. Despite appearance, **food insecurity** and issues related to “poor nutrition and obesity” are still prevalent in the community. Programs such as SNAP, HAT Packs in Hatboro, and summer meal programs were outlined as some of the ways the community and government is currently providing **more nutritious foods to food insecure families**. One group member provided a local statistic that “in the Moreland School District, we have 33 percent that are on a free or reduced [meal] program.” Despite the awareness of this issue, there are still barriers to utilizing and disseminating this resource because not every school is eligible for participation and there is still an onus on parents to “fill out the paperwork.”

Inequitable **access to quality and affordable healthcare** was expressed as an issue for many middle-class families in the area. One participant remarked that, “there’s not enough push, there is not enough groundswell in that population to create that in the middle.” **Navigating the health systems**, insurance coverage and available services is challenging because you need to figure out “where to go, how [to] get there, how [to] pay for it.” There were a few participants who specifically mentioned issues related to affordable dental care and how their insurance policies frequently do not cover the significant costs associated with getting a tooth “cap”, “x-rays”, or even a “cleaning.”

Focus group participants described the local hospitals as critical resources, but noted barriers to care. Abington Hospital was cited as a frequent site of care that offers great programming, but is ineffective at making them widely known and accessible. Participants reported long emergency department wait-times and lower levels of satisfaction as a result of the merger between Abington Hospital and Jefferson Hospital.

Exposure to social media, increased technology use, prevalence of food allergies, consumption of fast food, mental health, and “unstructured upbringing” were notable concerns for the local **youth**

population. Youth today were described as having decreased attention spans and lack of mental discipline in academic settings as a result of living in the “digital age.” One participant who works in the school district reported a noticeable increase in food allergies but was uncertain as to whether or not there is an actual increase in allergies or if more individuals feel comfortable admitting to having an issue. Participants blamed obesity rates on “fast food chains [being] all around and not enough exercise.” Issues related to mental health in school, specifically for girls, seemed to be embedded in social conflicts and bullying on social media platforms.

Affordable housing, loneliness, increased healthcare costs and copays, and lack of technological skills, were reported concerns for the **older adults** in the Willow Grove communities. Finding social activities and peers to interact with seem to be a bit challenging and with the speed at which technology continues to change, “they’re out of the loop and feel even more isolated...because they’re not digitally oriented and [they] feel less and less connected.” Despite these challenges, some participants brought up a few volunteer opportunities and fresh food vouchers available for seniors at a few local farms.

### **Priorities**

In Willow Grove, participants mentioned behavioral health, chronic disease, the physical environment, nutrition, social determinants, the social environment, availability of services, insurance coverage and affordability, navigation and education, and vulnerable populations as health priorities. Nutrition and social determinants were mentioned by many participants. Specifically, mental health was mentioned as a behavioral health issue, child obesity was a chronic disease priority, clean water was a physical environment issue, social media was a health behaviors issue, food insecurity and access to fresh and health food were nutrition priorities, housing was a social determinants issue, and youth and elder programming were social environment issues. Participants were concerned with the availability of youth care, and vulnerable populations included LGBT people.

### **Solutions**

Health priorities centered around affordable housing, food insecurity, and knowledge of and access to local programs and resources. Participants suggested additional farmers’ markets, and summer feeding programs at the local high schools as a way to address food insecurity issues. Participants suggested new eligibility criteria for affordable housing and subsidized food programs to reach more community members in need. Participants want to build “greater awareness and knowledge of local programming,” as well as hidden issues of homelessness amongst working families who outwardly appear secure and healthy. Lastly, participants want structured and “wholesome” afterschool and summer programs for youth in order to address their high usage of social media and increase positive social interactions both inside and outside of school.

## METHODS

A list of eighteen potential populations of special interest were prioritized by the Steering Committee for primary qualitative data collection for this year's assessment. The Committee recognized that there are many communities in the area with unique experiences and specific needs, and that no single data collection effort can comprehensively reflect the needs of all communities. Prioritization was based on the perceived magnitude of concerns facing communities, how emergent a concern was, and whether data already existed for a given population. The six populations prioritized for primary data collection were: Hispanic and Latino communities, African-American communities, people experiencing homelessness, people experiencing housing insecurity, prenatal and postpartum women, and people living with behavioral health conditions. Where available, findings from other recent primary data collection efforts for other populations of special interest have been included in the report.

The Steering Committee generated a list of potential key informants and organizations serving the populations of special interest across the four participating counties. Considerations in generating this list included ensuring representation across the four counties, representatives' capacity to speak from a vantage point of greater community reach, and balancing of frontline and bigger picture perspectives. The Health Care Improvement Foundation performed outreach to 117 organizations, inviting them to participate in telephonic focus group discussions. Given the volume of potential key informants for the behavioral health discussion, a separate call was conducted for each county. The focus group discussion guide was adapted from the geographically-based discussion guide. It included sections on general health needs of the population, needs of subpopulations such as children and older adults, access to care, and potential actions and solutions to address the population's needs. The focus group discussions were about one hour in length, and key informants who were unable to attend at the scheduled time were invited to submit written comments.

Focus group discussions were facilitated by the Senior Director, Population Health, at the Health Care Improvement Foundation. They were recorded and transcribed. Two note-takers also generated discussion notes. The Project Manager at the Health Care Improvement Foundation reviewed transcripts and notes from the focus group, then generated discussion summaries for each population of special interest. While the summaries were structured to follow the general format of the guide, each summary was individually organized to underscore key themes that emerged within each discussion section for that particular group. The ultimate goal for each summary was to create a narrative that accurately reflected the lived experiences of a given population, and the underlying forces that shape those experiences. For the behavioral health focus groups, a single summary that reflected themes across the discussions was generated, with county-specific sections following the overall content. The Senior Director reviewed all summaries to ensure they reflected the nature of the discussions.

## **African-American communities: Summary of major themes and health priorities**

### *Physical Health Concerns*

- Diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and hypertension were all identified as chronic diseases, with obesity raised as a particularly significant issue. Cancer was also a health concern.
- Place-based determinants and neighborhood environments play a strong role in the development of these health issues. For example, under-resourced communities have too many fast food places and not enough healthy food options.

### *Mental and Behavioral Health Concerns*

- Substance use, including opioid use, is prevalent and respondents noted that “demand is high” and “resources are slim” for treatment options. Treatment is short and insufficient, and sometimes located in areas near places where the substance use originally initiated, which could cause people in recovery to relapse.
- Multiple respondents agreed that African-American communities are vulnerable to violence, such as shootings, and resultant trauma. This violence is a result of root causes that create resource disparities and desperation, including intergenerational poverty, limited educational opportunities, limited housing, and issues with crowding.
- Respondents noted “incredible amounts” of depression and anxiety, concurrent with an increase in drugs to offset those conditions. Respondents noted an associated stigma with mental health conditions in some black communities, which can make it more difficult for providers to address.

### *Serving African-American Children: Health Concerns*

- One respondent reflected on recognizing a child’s position in a family. They are “powerless” in that they are subject to an adult’s control and bound by their environment, but they also exhibit resilience.
- Parents who struggle with the continual exhaustion of limited income, multiple jobs, and raising multiple children may have limited bandwidth to offer support to their children. As a result, children may not have well-visits and may be late on immunizations.
- Obesity and asthma are significant health concerns for children.
- African-American teens may experience depression, anxiety, bullying, and negative effects from exposure to technology. Trauma from exposure to violence or substance use may also have strong effects. Homeless teens may have additional difficulties thriving in school.

### *Serving African-American Children: Systems Issues*

- Accessing mental health services for children is a particularly significant issue; respondents described children in school settings on waiting lists to be screened.
- Respondents identified gaps in knowledge of how to access health care, find insurance, navigate the system, and complete care transition from pediatric to adult care.
- The school system is not set up to encourage education. Students are rushed to move along even if they are not fully prepared. A lack of faculty continuity means a high proportion of

substitute teachers. Child illness also contributes to absenteeism, which has implications for future educational and professional opportunities.

### *Serving African-American Older Adults*

- Seniors have fears around safety in their neighborhoods, which present barriers to accessing resources like food, medication, and exercise.
- One respondent noted that as African-Americans age and need to see their providers more, the fear of hearing bad news increases, which seems especially prevalent in men.
- Older adults experience worry over their younger family members, especially when circumstances create family structures where grandparents are caretakers of their grandchildren. They may also feel a sense of loss for their adult children.

### **Access to care**

#### *Underlying barriers to access*

- Providers who converge in a small number of large complexes create deficits where other pockets of communities have no locally accessible health care.
- Transportation can pose a significant barrier when families need to take several buses or trains to get care.
- Some families cannot afford to miss work, which makes seeking healthcare a challenge.
- Respondents also noted a tendency to seek care from the emergency department rather than seeking primary care. This preference is likely due to interrelated issues of transportation and financial barriers causing delays in care, people not having insurance coverage, and/or a lack of familiarity with navigating the health care system's care options.

#### *Navigation and system challenges*

- Respondents noted that some people within African-American communities may lack insurance or, if they have it, they may not be familiar with how to use it.
- Even when people can access health care facilities, respondents noted a reluctance to receive care, because of the biases they experience when interacting with health care providers. Respondents reported that patients feel like "an underclass, subclass, alternative class."
- Respondents noted specialists are difficult to access, with long waitlists and long spans of time waiting for an appointment. Patients find specialist care difficult to navigate successfully and are "sent through insurance roundabouts."
- Respondents also discussed the shortage of psychiatrists, leading to poor mental health care that overmedicates patients who would benefit from therapy.

### **Potential actions and solutions include:**

- Respondents noted that addressing violence and community trauma is one of the most important priorities to better serve African-American communities.
- The health care system must do a better job of helping African-American patients feel welcome, to overcome histories of mistreatment, discrimination, and subsequent mistrust. This culture

shift includes prioritizing minority representation among health care providers and treating all patients respectfully and without bias.

- Community and senior centers, schools, libraries, and other public spaces are areas to embed navigators and Community Health Workers to assist with benefits enrollment, preventive education, and accessing the health care system.
- Community engagement efforts should be expanded. Outreach should ideally encourage preventive care and provide information about the types of care and services available to patients. Community outreach also serves a dual purpose by meeting community members where they feel comfortable.
- Respondents stressed regular, quick access to health services as fundamental to encouraging prevention and/or early identification of health needs. Providing navigators to assist patients can help circumvent bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- For seniors, offering home visits to increase access to, and utilization of, care.

**Notable quotations:**

(On reluctance to interact with the health care system due to the interpersonal treatment experienced there): “How long can I go with the pain I’m having to avoid how I feel after I leave this place that is supposed to take care of me?”

## **Behavioral Health: Summary of major themes and health priorities**

### *Mental and Behavioral Health Concerns*

- The opioid epidemic was identified as a significant crisis, resulting in complex medical needs and deaths by overdose. Issues compounding opioid use include limited availability of treatment resources, insufficient wraparound services to support people in recovery, and a lack of housing that offers a safe environment without the presence of other users, which can precipitate relapse.
- Methamphetamine use was identified as an increasing need in Montgomery County.
- Patients suffering from significant mental health crisis have comparatively shorter life expectancy, leading respondents to question whether current treatment regimens are really changing the course of patients' lives.
- Respondents noted the prevalence of anxiety disorder and related medical symptoms, including headaches back pain, neck problems, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue syndrome.
- Respondents in three of the four counties noted the upward trend of deaths by suicide.

### *Concurrent Physical Health Concerns*

- Medical conditions that are exacerbated by smoking, alcohol, or illicit drug use, including: obesity, pain syndromes (orthopedic issues, arthritis, fibromyalgia, and migraines), cellulitis, skin abscesses, cirrhosis, sexually transmitted disease, tuberculosis, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes, cancer, COPD, and asthma.
- Hepatitis C was identified as a growing concern in Bucks and Montgomery counties, along with a general need to test for sexually transmitted diseases in populations of injecting drug users.
- Patients with behavioral health conditions have significant dental needs and often lack preventive care. The physical appearance of poor dental health can also present a barrier for patients seeking employment.
- Psychotropic medications may cause side effects and long-term effects, which may contribute to chronic medical conditions like diabetes.

### *Root Causes and Competing Issues:*

- Across the counties, respondents cited multiple barriers related to social determinants of health that create additional challenges for behavioral health patients.
- These determinants include a lack of affordable housing, limited employment opportunities, lack of access to healthy foods and poor nutrition, limited transportation, and low socioeconomic status.
- Respondents stressed the persistence of stigma towards people with mental health conditions and substance use disorder among health care providers. Stigma can lead to providers dismissing patients' concerns or can expose patients to trauma and discrimination within healthcare settings.

## **Subpopulations: Children**

### *Trauma*

- Childhood trauma emerged as a critical issue across all the counties. Although key informants mentioned adult trauma and trauma interacting with the healthcare system, they spoke at length of the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACES), and the negative behavioral and physical outcomes that can emerge.
- These experiences include the stress of growing up in a single-parent household, a lack of developing healthy attachments, parents who have skill deficits in caregiving, parents who have their own behavioral health issues, homelessness, and the high daily allostatic load of growing up in the context of intergenerational poverty.
- Respondents in Philadelphia and Chester counties also noted specific risk of harm for LGBTQI children if behavioral health providers are not sensitive to their experiences, and if providers wrongly assume sexual and gender identities to be products of past trauma.
- Chester County respondents noted a diversity of cultural backgrounds among youth and emphasized the importance of ensuring access to bilingual, bicultural health care providers who make children from any background feel welcome.

### *Mental Health Concerns*

- Bullying, in particular through social media, emerged as a concern that affects children at younger and younger ages.
- Respondents noted recent data trends appear to show an increase in adolescent and young adult suicide rates, which may be affected by a drop-off in treatment in high schools.
- Anxiety, depression, and ADHD were all cited as mental health conditions affecting this group.
- Children need support developing skills to encourage social-emotional regulation, in order to manage behavioral health conditions, trauma, and other stressors. A Montgomery County respondent noted social-emotional learning programs being placed in preschools and elementary schools.
- In Montgomery and Chester Counties, respondents noted a significant burden of stress and pressure to succeed academically in older children from well-off communities.

### *Substance Use*

- Across the counties, respondents expressed concern regarding an increase in youth substance use, including alcohol, opioids, marijuana, cigarettes, and especially electronic vaping.
- Related concerns included youth being unaware of the carcinogenic effects of alcohol, e-cigarettes being expressly marketed to young people, and a misperception that there is a “healthier” way to smoke.
- A resultant need for in-patient rehabilitative services has emerged for this population.

### *Physical Health Concerns*

- One respondent noted increases in childhood asthma, diabetes, and pre-diabetes.
- These issues may be due to genetics, poor nutrition and eating habits, or the psychotropic medications children take.

### *Barriers to Access*

Barriers to access that specifically affect children include:

- A dearth of child psychiatrists.
- Long emergency department wait times (as much as a week) before securing inpatient behavioral health placement.



- A system that is not built for addressing behavioral health concerns of very young children, resulting in misdiagnoses, delayed identification, and a lack of prevention.
- Misdiagnoses of other vulnerable groups. For example, Philadelphia respondents noted young boys of color may be disproportionately and incorrectly diagnosed with conduct disorder due to racial bias.

## **Subpopulations: Older Adults**

### *Mental Health Conditions and Substance Use*

- Loneliness, grief, depression, and isolation may all affect older adults.
- Resurgence of past substance use patterns may appear in older adults. Substance use may be a strategy to cope with mental health conditions or may result from pain management of physical conditions.
- Key informants noted the use of alcohol, benzodiazepines, and opioids in this population; overdoses as a result of substance use are also a problem.

### *Barriers to Access*

- Limited care coordination and medication management present increased risks to seniors. Respondents reported that caregivers and family do not always know an older family member's medication regimen. Similarly, multiple providers across specialties may not be aware of all prescribed medications, which increases risk for dependence and adverse events.
- A lack of in-house geropsychiatric services and expertise in retirement communities, assisted living, and nursing facilities.
- A lack of covered services to address hearing and dental issues.
- The intersection of advanced age and social determinants of health may compound difficulties for older adults. Limited access to transportation, nutritious food, and affordable housing reduces the ability for older adults to access basic services and resources, let alone comprehensive care.

## **Access to Care**

### *Integration and Coordination*

- Respondents reported a lack of coordination across mental and behavioral health and physical care providers, specialists, etc.
- As an example, in Chester County, behavioral health counselors have discovered some patients are not disclosing symptoms, concerns, or needs to primary care physicians, resulting in gaps in care.
- Respondents described a resultant "catch-22" effect, where providers in a particular care setting may be reluctant to treat or admit a patient with concurrent behavioral and physical health needs. An example provided by Bucks County informants was the case of behavioral health patients with skin abscesses: behavioral health specialists may not want to admit the patient due to an inability to address the wound issue, while general community medical hospitals may not feel equipped to address the behavioral health condition(s).

- A subsequent “sick care system” exists in the behavioral health space. The focus must shift to prevention and early identification, which requires engagement of physical health providers like primary care providers.

#### *Insurance and Cost*

- Coordination across insurance providers is also a need (for example, between commercial and public payers if a patient has primary and secondary coverage).
- Respondents noted a very limited number of providers across the counties take Medicaid.
- Across multiple types of insurance (Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance) patients sometimes cannot afford the cost of either psychiatric or physical medications.

#### *Navigation*

- Patients do not always know the most appropriate entry point to the health care system for various needs.
- Respondents also noted that, within a “sick care system” framework, the emergency department (ED) is frequently the entry point for patients with significant behavioral health needs. They stressed the importance of ED staff being well-trained in trauma-informed care and committed to reducing stigmatization of this vulnerable and complex patient population.
- Challenges imposed by social determinants of health (such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, transportation, employment, and childcare) affect patients’ ability to access and navigate health care services.

#### *Availability*

- Across the counties, respondents cited a dearth of psychiatrists as a key issue, reflecting national trends. In particular, child psychiatry presents a significant gap in access to care.
- A lack of reimbursement parity for mental/behavioral health specialists, when compared to physical care, contributes to the paucity of available providers.
- Respondents reported extremely long wait times for accessing care, such as a week of boarding in the emergency department while waiting for inpatient behavioral health care (especially for patients with intellectual disabilities), 6-8 weeks for a psychiatric or therapeutic appointment, or as long as 3-4 months to a year for a physical health specialist appointment.

### **County-specific characteristics and priorities**

#### *Bucks County: Unique Characteristics and Top Priorities*

- Bucks County respondents stressed the effects of limited transportation in the county, which can affect patients’ ability to work, find affordable housing, and access healthy food.
- There is particular difficulty finding adequate specialists in-network for patients in an accessible geographic location in the county. People have to travel significant distances to see a specialist, which presents a real challenge for patients with public insurance.
- Respondents noted the public behavioral health system in Bucks County is overburdened. A majority of patients who present at public crisis centers are covered by commercial insurers that do not cover crisis. The public system also handles activities like bed searches without commercial insurer involvement, which stretches capacity.
- Top Priorities:
  - Care coordination and information exchange across care providers in behavioral, primary, dental, and specialty care to treat the whole person holistically.

- Coordination between primary care and behavioral health providers to encourage prevention. Primary care providers were described as the “front door” and the “guard of good health.”
- Ensuring accountability and integration of commercial insurers to reduce the burden on the public system.

#### *Chester County: Unique Characteristics and Top Priorities*

- Chester County residents have a wide range of socioeconomic status, which translates to substantial variation in insurance status and health care options. Some populations are uninsured and have competing needs such as housing instability and limited income, but a high percentage of people have private insurance.
- Chester County is fairly spread out and rural, meaning transportation to appointments is difficult, especially for people with limited income with few options for affordable housing across the county.
- Affordable housing can be particularly limited for older adults, whose incomes may be fixed and who are concomitantly affected by food, nutrition, and transportation issues. Navigating the health care system is also a notable issue for older adults.
- Chester County informants noted that people who are resource-poor in wealthier counties can be even more disproportionately affected by limited affordable housing options.
- Chester County respondents voiced the longest appointment wait times for physical care specialists. Some care managers have started taking patients into Philadelphia to see specialists, which results in high quality care but presents an even greater transportation barrier.
- Engagement of bilingual, bicultural health care workers to serve children of diverse cultural backgrounds in any health care setting was particularly notable for Latino communities in Chester County.
- Top Priorities:
  - Recognition of childhood trauma across all systems and investment in early identification as a community. One respondent expanded on this to include screening for mental health conditions such as depression, suicide, and trauma.
  - Addressing problems with substance use disorder.
  - Identifying and addressing social determinants of health, particularly transportation and access/connection to resources and services.

#### *Montgomery County: Unique Characteristics and Top Priorities*

- Montgomery County respondents expressed particular concern regarding substance use in the county. They noted increases in related or concurrent conditions like cirrhosis, HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, and tuberculosis. They also emphasized drug-related mortality, noting that organ donation has actually increased due to young, otherwise healthy individuals dying of overdose.
- System issues affect treatment for substance use in the county. Some providers have been reluctant to acquire waivers to administer medically assisted treatment. Newcomers to the healthcare system, such as urgent care facilities, are not always familiar with local behavioral healthcare entities that provide drug and alcohol services.

- Montgomery County respondents noted that autism diagnoses are increasing, perhaps due to early identification, which creates an increased need for services. One respondent posited that some children receiving an autism diagnosis may actually have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- Respondents also noted the inter-connected nature of behavioral health, physical health, and social determinants of health. Social determinants are “like the legs of a stool” for “people on the margins” and “if one of the legs is kicked out, it starts to impact the other[s].”
- Top Priorities:
  - Preventing people dying from opioid overdose.
  - Addressing the stigma of behavioral health challenges, especially substance use disorder.
  - Encouraging trauma-informed care across health care providers and community services.

#### *Philadelphia County: Unique Characteristics and Top Priorities*

- Children’s mental and behavioral health emerged as a strong priority in this discussion; childhood trauma, while discussed across all behavioral health focus groups, was particularly emphasized in the Philadelphia county group.
- Respondents noted the particular role social determinants of health play in behavioral health in Philadelphia, given the county’s poverty level, urban environment, and housing system.
- Philadelphia respondents emphasized the importance of research and evaluation of behavioral health data to assess quality, understand the epidemiology and etiology of behavioral health conditions, and predict future crises so as to proactively address them and mitigate their effects.
- Respondents noted access issues based on proximity of care to neighborhoods, especially for specialized treatments that may exist outside of the immediate neighborhood area.
- Youth violence may be increasing in Philadelphia. Respondents also cautioned how to interpret and discuss violence among youth; perpetration is often precipitated by depression or stressors due to social determinants of health.
- Top Priorities:
  - Prevention and mitigation of trauma in children.
  - Systems-level behavioral and physical health care integration.
  - A preventive, community-based lens that focuses on wellness, patient activation, and navigation.
  - Comprehensive and broad-based treatment options that include strength-based and resilience programming.
  - A data-driven and prevention-focused behavioral health system.
  - Addressing workforce shortages in behavioral health and human services generally; a fair and living wage for behavior health care providers that mirrors that of physical providers.

#### **Potential actions and solutions:**

- Physical care providers must be prepared to identify behavioral health needs and be familiar with community resources and referrals. In particular:
  - Primary care providers may co-locate or integrate with behavioral health specialists, and should provide education to encourage mental wellness.

- Pediatricians should screen for trauma and behavioral health conditions to encourage prevention/early identification.
- ED personnel should be trained in medically assisted treatment. One respondent noted they typically see better outcomes for patients who visit EDs that have embedded social workers.
- All providers should be trained in trauma-informed care.
- All health care workers would benefit from higher levels of awareness and training related to suicide risk.
- Expansion to non-traditional service models, including:
  - Home-based and mobile care to help older adults circumvent mobility issues and depression, which diminish ability to access traditional services.
  - Telepsychiatry services to overcome the shortage of psychiatrists.
  - Programs addressing social determinants, like ridesharing programs to serve behavioral health patients.
  - Multiple respondents emphasized the value of a centralized hub that offers a variety of physical, behavioral, and social services.
  - Peer specialists to assist patients with accessing resources like employment support and food.
- A commitment to coordination, integration, and team-based care across silos, including:
  - Robust information exchange across behavioral health, physical health, social services, and community-based resources.
  - Robust discharge planning between hospitals and ambulatory care, involving community partners and resources (such as Transnet) as well as physical and behavioral health providers.
  - Warm hand-off projects, both within health systems and with external partners, such as county departments.
  - Incentive mechanisms for team-based care.
  - Addressing systemic issues such as commercial insurance accountability, shortages of psychiatric care providers, and behavioral health reimbursement parity.

#### **Notable quotations:**

“[Social determinants of health are...] almost like the legs of a stool...For people who are on the margins, one of the legs gets kicked out, it just starts to impact the others. If a person has a loss of employment they could experience – if they’ve experienced depression in the past, or aren’t sort of taking care of their mental wellness at that point, it sort of leads to a state of depression that might become significant, or they can’t afford their medications. It can really take somebody into a downward spiral.”  
(Montgomery County)

“We have so few specialists available to our population and the primary care physician is kind of like the front door – preventative – and the guard of good health. If we aren’t coordinating and working with those individuals, then our chances of really getting a good health outcome, I think, is greatly reduced.”  
(Bucks County)

“We really have what I would classify as a sick care system in the behavioral health state. We don’t have much in the way of prevention. And maybe as we move toward integrating care, and primary care plays a bigger role and...when we look at treating some of the comorbid issues of depression and anxiety in primary care, maybe we’ll start to move more to a prevention-based system. You don’t get a well mental health checkup annually, and I think that that’s part of why people I think go so long before they seek the care they need. How do you move to [sic] a health system to healthy care rather than sick care?” (Philadelphia County)

# CHNA Health Center Key Informant Interviews Report – March, 2019

## Health Federation of Philadelphia

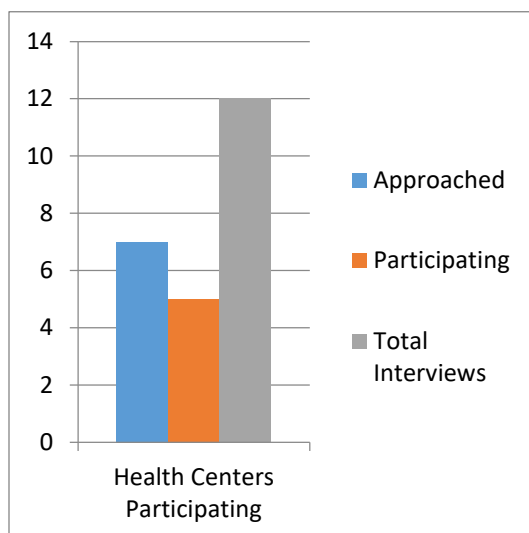
### Introduction/background/methodology:

The Health Federation of Philadelphia (HFP) was asked to facilitate key informant interviews with federally qualified health center staff in the service areas of participating hospitals. These interviews were intended to explore areas of community need for hospital/health system engagement from the health center perspective. An interview guide was developed and reviewed with Susan Choi from the Healthcare Improvement Foundation and Raynard Washington from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health. This guide is attached to the report as Appendix B.

The Senior Director of Population Health at HFP created a list of health centers that share service areas with participating hospitals. She then reached out to health center leadership to inform them about the goals of the project and to ask that they designate a key informant. These individuals then received an email with some background information, asking that they schedule a 30-minute interview at their convenience. Of the seven health center organizations who were approached, five participated. More than one site participated for some organizations, resulting in a total of twelve interviews. The full list of interviewees is included in

Appendix A, with their titles and health center affiliations. Respondents were a mixture of senior leadership, clinicians, and site administrators.

Interviews were conducted over the phone, using a Google form to guide the interviews and capture notes. Interviews lasted between 20 and 50 minutes depending on the key informant. Interviews were conducted by either Suzanne Cohen, Senior Director of Population Health at HFP, or Laura Line, a consultant for HFP. All interviews were recorded as back-up to interviewer notes.



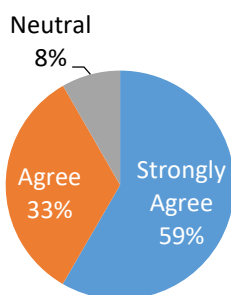
## Results

### Access to Care

#### Specialty Care

Over 90 percent of respondents agreed that their patients/community need greater access to specialty care. *Uninsured patients and uninsurable/undocumented patients* were the most often cited populations needing greater access. Other populations mentioned include working poor patients with high co-pays/deductibles, and patients with limited English proficiency

Do you agree/disagree that your patients need better access to specialty care?



Specific types of specialty care cited (in order of frequency) that were more difficult to access include:

- Dermatology
- Rheumatology, urology, cardiology, ENT,
- Psychiatric care, physical/occupational therapy, neurology
- GI specialists, pulmonology, dialysis, podiatry, optometry and ophthalmology, and neurosurgery.

#### Diagnostic Testing:

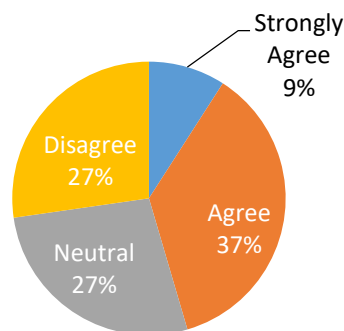
Fewer obstacles were perceived regarding access to diagnostic testing that cannot be performed within most health centers. However, forty-five percent of respondents indicated that patients needed greater access to some types of diagnostic testing.

- Five respondents stated that their patients needed better access to images and scans,
- Four said that colonoscopy access was an issue, and
- Three cited mammograms.

Notably, one suburban respondent indicated significantly greater barriers to diagnostic testing and specialty care for both Medicaid and uninsured/underinsured patients than the Philadelphia respondents, who tended to see access as problematic at times or for certain patients, but much more available across the board.

Health center key informants clarified that while there may be some access to these specialties and tests, particularly for patients with Medicaid coverage, patients often experience long waits of up to six months or a year to get appointments with certain specialists, and may have barriers related to transportation, language, or their specific Medicaid MCO not having a contract with the closest hospital. Transportation was perceived as an especially challenging barrier, due to the unreliability of Logisticare

Do you agree/disagree that your patients need greater access to diagnostic testing?





and lack of other affordable, reliable options for people with mobility challenges. Two health centers that are located less centrally cited distance to specialty care/diagnostic testing as a barrier.

Other obstacles to receiving specialty care cited were *lack of patient-friendly, multi-lingual, low-literacy educational materials* (for example regarding colonoscopy), *difficulty in getting time off from work*, *lack of choice* in where to go for services based on insurance coverage or contracts, and, for those with incomes not quite low enough to qualify for Medicaid, *high deductibles and co-pays*.

How can hospitals and health systems help with these access issues? When asked, most responses focused on:

- Navigation,
- Transportation,
- Care coordination and
- Information exchange/communication.

In addition, where not already available, hospitals were urged to provide **discounted access to diagnostic testing and specialty care for uninsured patients**, so that patients do not need to wait for a life-threatening emergency to receive care through the ER, incurring huge bills that are never paid.

Specific ideas to increase access included:

#### *Navigation*

- Hire navigators on the hospital/health system side for full continuum of patient experience.
- Hire Spanish speakers for navigation and other patient contact positions.
- Schedule appointments with outside providers as part of discharge.
- Provide samples/discounts on medications and enroll patients in prescription assistance programs.

#### *Transportation*

- Offer transportation/van service.

#### *Care Coordination*

- Do outreach to patients for follow-up to specialty care appointments.
- Let health center know UPON ADMISSION of their patients, as well as BEFORE DISCHARGE. Coordinate care, imaging and medications.
- Follow-up with patients/providers on discharge plans.

#### *Information exchange/communication*

- Block appointments for health center patients to get specialty care; work with a health center staff member to coordinate appointments.
- When discharging patients with mental health challenges, contact health center directly (speak with provider) to develop a plan.

Primary barriers accessing specialists and testing:

- Transportation (e.g. unreliable, unaffordable)
- Insurance issues – uninsured/underinsured,

*"[Patients} have Logisticare but [there is the] time constraint of 72 hours advance notice and must have a scheduled appointment. Patients may not have enough minutes to receive a call or confirmation on their phone. Logisticare can't text with patients. Patients wait forever, drivers don't say they're late."*

ng  
plans  
or  
n literacy

- Share information on barriers that each side (health center and hospital) has; work to address these barriers.
- Greater access to health system EHRs.

### **Social Determinants of Health:**

When asked about their perceptions of social needs where hospitals and health systems could support their patients and communities, respondents stated that health systems could be more involved in:

- Patient navigation (9/12),
- Insurance coverage (8/12),
- Housing (8/12),
- Food insecurity (7/12), and
- Transportation (7/12).

Another area of potential collaboration mentioned was the *opioid epidemic*.

How might hospitals and health systems be involved in these issues? Many responses focused again on *information exchange* and *care coordination* between hospitals and health centers as well as other community resources. Health center informants would like hospital staff to *be more knowledgeable about health centers, understand the range of services offered, and the process for becoming a patient*, rather than simply providing a location and telling the patient to go there.

Another area where health centers would like to see more communication and continuity is around *insurance coverage enrollment*. For example, if an insurance application is started in the hospital, it is important for community providers to get access to that information, so that they are not forced to start the process all over again. To facilitate this coordination, health centers recommended face to face meetings between hospital and health center staff as well as clearly defined means for phone communication.

Specific ideas related to *food insecurity, housing, and transportation* included:

- Hospitals giving food vouchers or food baskets,
- Information on food banks and other sources of meals, more focus on nutrition counseling and diabetes education
- homeless services or housing organizations having out-stationed staff in emergency departments
- Hospitals providing screening and navigation to social services resources.

### **Care Innovations:**

When asked about specific areas of “care innovation”, and how these could support both hospitals and health centers in meeting patient and community needs, respondents emphasized:

- Shared resources for social needs referrals (i.e. software platforms) (11 /12)
- Collaboration on medication adherence programs (11/12),
- Telemedicine (10/12),
- Health literacy (8/12), and

- Shared or community based staff (8/12).

In addition, health center staff mentioned that *electronic information sharing* (through health information exchange or portal access to hospital systems) has been very helpful.

Many respondents were enthusiastic about the potential of *telemedicine* to:

- Increase access to specialty care, especially dermatology, and
- Increase the flow of information from resources like home visiting nurses back to the primary care provider.
- Connect patients in the emergency department with primary care.

Innovations to *increase information sharing about medication* were also popular. Specifically, health center staff were interested in mechanisms to increase knowledge of medication prescribed in multiple environments, similar to the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, but broader. Some of the concerns noted by health centers may be able to be resolved through greater knowledge of and access to Surescripts Medication History functionality in their Electronic Health Records. However, this resource does not currently include information on patients whose medications are not currently billed through insurance.

*"[We need] verbal/phone exchange between health centers and hospitals with specific point people on each side on each patient. More of a team approach where health center providers have a relationship with hospital providers, focus on patient care and making the most of it."*

#### **Collaborative Care Management:**

Health center informants were enthusiastic about enhancing programs to coordinate care management with hospitals and health systems. Responses throughout the interview often noted lack of coordination and the need for greater communication. Respondents felt that improvements were necessary especially for "high risk" or "frequent flyer" patients.

Specific collaboration ideas included:

- Manage patients who are frequent ER users together (hospitals and health centers),
- Personal interaction with care team members (discharge planners, care management nurses, social workers as well as providers),
- Outstationed or shared staff, and
- Increased access to partner's electronic health records.

#### **Other partners:**

Finally, respondents provided suggestions on who should participate with health systems and health centers in meeting patient/community needs. Responses included:

*Healthcare*

- Pharmacy
- Behavioral health providers
- Insurance companies,
- Home health agencies
- Specialty dental care
- Natural healing/wellness resources, e.g. acupuncture

#### *Broader environment*

- Community organizations, especially the faith-based community
- Homeless serving agencies
- City government – including agencies that impact the broader environment in which people live, like Licenses and Inspections
- Food organizations and retail food businesses
- Transportation services
- Benefits enrollment assisters
- Libraries

#### **Conclusions:**

Health center key informants overwhelmingly cited issues related to insurance coverage, transportation, and language access as barriers to care and to achieving good health for their patients. In addition, health centers cited numerous barriers to comprehensive, coordinated care across the outpatient/inpatient continuum. Health center leaders indicated that hospitals and health systems are important partners in addressing these barriers and cited many options for accomplishing this – including both technology and more personal approaches.

**Appendix B**  
**List of Interviewees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Health Center</b>	<b>Title</b>
Karen Norris	Esperanza Health Center	Volunteer Coordinator
Aramide Ayorinde	Greater Philadelphia Health Action	Chief Utilization Operations Officer
Vanessa Johnson	City of Philadelphia	Health Center Director – Health Center 3
Kyle Faye	FPCN	Primary Care Provider/Family Medicine, Health Annex Site
Mary Thornton-Bowmer	FPCN	Family Nurse Practitioner, 11th Street Family Health Services
Sara Enes Thorpe	City of Philadelphia	Director of Health Center #2
Hope Feldman	FPCN	Family Nurse Practitioner, Abbottsford Falls Health Center
Chanel Conley	City of Philadelphia	Director, HC #9
Stu Katz	City of Philadelphia	Health Center Director -- Health Center 4
Joan Bland	City of Philadelphia	Director, Health Center 10
Kevin McCabe	ChesPenn Health Center	Family Physician, ChesPenn - Coatesville
Jodetta Bunyon, Frank Killian	PHMC	Health Center Administrator, Rising Sun HC and Director of Nursing Centers Network Operations

## Appendix B Interview Guide

### CHNA Interview

A number of hospitals and health systems in Philadelphia and surrounding counties are collaborating on a joint Community Health Needs Assessment process.

Every three years, non-profit hospitals are required by federal law to conduct a Community Health Needs Assessment. This interview is part of the information-gathering process that will provide the basis for the Needs Assessment report, and will help to determine how hospitals and health systems spend their community benefit dollars in the future. Given the unique role of health centers in this community, hospital and health system representatives are interested in incorporating your perspective, and that of your colleagues at health centers in their service areas, into the Needs Assessment process.

This interview will take no more than 30 minutes. Your comments will be recorded by the interviewer in notes and will be analyzed along with notes from other interviews, and presented in a summary report to the Steering Committee of the Joint CHNA process. You will be identified as a key informant, but no comments will be attributed specifically to you or to your health center. We are happy to share this report with you when it is completed. Thank you so much for your time.

Given your knowledge of needs in your health center's community and the patients you serve, please help us share with hospitals and health systems the unmet needs for your patients and any opportunities for collaboration.

### Personal Information

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Health Center \_\_\_\_\_

3. Position \_\_\_\_\_

### Access to Care

4. *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Option 1

5. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree that your patients and your community need greater access to specialty care:

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

6. If access to specialty care is a priority, what kind(s) and for which populations?

**7. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree that your patients and your community need greater access to diagnostic testing:**

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

**8. What types of diagnostic testing do patients need more access to?**

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Colonoscopy
- ☐ Mammograms
- ☐ Images and scans
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What else impacts/inhibits your patients access to care?**

**10. Are there subpopulations that have specific issues getting access to care?**

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Children
- ☐ Uninsured
- ☐ Undocumented
- ☐ Homeless patients
- ☐ Pregnant and/or postpartum patients
- ☐ Patients with substance use disorder
- ☐ Seniors
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. What are the specific access challenges these sub-populations face?**

**12. What specialty or hospital services are most challenging for these sub-populations to access?**

**13. How could hospitals and health systems help address the access to care issues you have raised?**

### **Social Determinants of Health**

What needs do you see in the broadly defined area of social determinants of health?

**14. Do you perceive community needs where hospitals could help in the areas of:**

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Patient navigation
- ☐ Insurance coverage
- ☐ Food insecurity
- ☐ Transportation

- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. How could hospitals and health systems most effectively collaborate with you or your community to address any of these social determinant needs?**

## **Care Innovations**

**16. Which of the following do you think could be areas of collaboration with hospitals and health systems?:**

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Telemedicine
- ☐ Shared or community-based staff
- ☐ Shared resources, like access to software platforms for social needs referrals
- ☐ Medication issues such as getting medications, understanding the meds received and taking meds
- ☐ Health literacy
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**17. For any areas you identified, can you tell me a little bit more about what collaboration might look like?**

**18. Hospitals and health centers are working together to some extent on care management for high need patients. How might hospitals and health centers collaborate to further address care management and care transitions?**

**19. More broadly, who, in addition to health centers, do you think hospitals and health systems need to collaborate with to address community needs?**

**20. Do you have additional suggestions on how hospitals and health systems can benefit the communities you both serve?**



## Hispanic/Latino communities: Summary of major themes and health priorities

### *Culture and care*

- Multiple respondents emphasized that culturally competent and linguistically appropriate care are critical to addressing the needs of Hispanic and Latino communities.
- Respondents shared that some health systems have not built trust with newly arrived patients or with well-established Latino communities. Unfamiliarity and disengagement with Latino communities creates mistrust and disconnects between providers and the patients they serve.
- Respondents shared that local public health entities are not focused on addressing the prevalence of chronic health conditions in Hispanic and Latino communities. For example, vast majorities of Latino clients in some health and wellness programs have diabetes or pre-diabetes; in some programs the prevalence approaches 90 percent. A lack of prioritization is compounded by a general lack of knowledge about serving the needs of Hispanic/Latino communities.
- Intersections of cultural traditions, acculturation to Western norms, and intergenerational differences can affect how Hispanic and Latino families interact with their health. These considerations can affect things like diet, substance use, and managing chronic conditions.

### *Serving younger Hispanic and Latino children*

- Multiple respondents described chronic stress as a result of the modern political climate and an ever-present culture of fear. Respondents described children being affected by exposure to Spanish-speaking media outlets in the home regarding the state of their countries of origin, or children crying in elementary and middle-school classrooms due to stress and uncertainty about how welcome their families and communities are in the United States.
- There is substantial need for dental services, as raised by respondents describing children who are referred by schools and have never seen a dentist. These children have significant oral health issues that necessitate many visits and sometimes surgical procedures.
- Family context can also affect children's health. Parents with limited language or literacy skills may have difficulty understanding requirements such as immunizations or other forms needed for school, and parents with inflexible work schedules or transportation challenges may have trouble taking their children in for visits.

### *Serving older Hispanic and Latino children*

- One respondent also mentioned bullying as a stressor for Latino children. Another mentioned seeing an elevated rate of panic attacks in teenagers.
- In addition, several respondents mentioned the high rate of pregnancy among teenage Latinas as young as 13-15 years old. Contributing factors included high rates among girls who have recently arrived in the United States, several client cases where the teenagers' parents approved of beginning motherhood at a younger age, and a lack of sexual education curricula being offered in high schools.
- In Bucks County, respondents noted how interactions with the school system affected several of these issues. Examples included sexual education not taking place in high school settings and a lack of resources in schools to help bridge language and communication issues.

### *Serving Hispanic and Latino older adults*

- Loneliness, depression, and isolation emerged as key issues facing older adults.
- Social determinants of health can play a heightened role in older adults' health. Respondents described older Latinos struggling to afford and manage their medications, pay copayments, and access healthy food. For some seniors, even when participating in food access programs, the food is often not culturally appropriate and does not include fresh, nutritious produce.

### *Access to care: appropriateness and availability*

- Multiple respondents strongly emphasized the need for linguistically appropriate care throughout the discussion. They noted that Hispanics and Latinos are not linguistically or culturally monolithic, but come from many different countries and dialects. Providers must be sensitive to the diverse cultural backgrounds of Hispanic and Latino communities.
- Respondents described significant waitlists for bilingual counseling services.

### *Access to care: culture, climate, and root causes*

- Multiple respondents noted that a lack of health insurance greatly affects access to care. Undocumented community members may also avoid or delay seeking care due to fear of deportation, resulting in emergency department visits.
- Nationally, rhetoric around immigration has had a tremendous effect on Latino communities. One respondent described expectant mothers who are scared of delivering in the hospital out of fear that they will be separated from their baby.
- The following structural barriers and social determinants of health can also affect access:
  - Transportation was identified as a challenge.
  - Missing work to receive care can present a proportionally greater economic risk for people who may not receive paid time off.
  - Affording healthy foods can also be a challenge, as can accessing culturally appropriate foods that a family is familiar with preparing.

### **Potential actions and solutions include:**

- Health care systems consciously positioning themselves as places where Hispanic and Latino patients can feel safe and welcome.
- Committing to serving uninsured patients.
- Conducting community outreach to encourage early engagement with the healthcare system.
- Offering comprehensive language access services is critical to encouraging interaction with the health care system and ensuring high-quality care. Interpretation and translation services are necessary components, but respondents emphasized that bilingual care staff can facilitate high quality care, system navigation, and relationship-building.
- Layering multiple interventions. A holistic approach can support behavior change in substance use, weight control, blood pressure control, diabetes prevention, and healthy diet. Interventions may include food demonstrations, exercise classes, field trips, and wraparound services for mental health.

- Engaging children in establishing healthy lifestyles can further encourage successful behavior change.
- Offering family planning services and sexual education in school systems to curb teenage pregnancy.
- Providing activities and social events for older adults to participate in, such as exercise classes. Holding activities in intergenerational settings can encourage attendance to reduce age-related stigma of senior centers.

**Notable quotations:**

“This community, for the most part, has been pushed aside and we haven't been able to build trust. I think that is a fundamental thing.”

## People experiencing homelessness: Summary of major themes and health priorities

### *Physical Health Concerns and Root Causes*

- Far and away, respondents concurred that the greatest need of people experiencing homelessness is safe, stable housing. Poverty and hunger, or a lack of consistent access to food, are also concerns.
- Respondents listed acute physical needs resulting from unsafe and unstable conditions of living without a home, including: exposure, adverse effects of not getting enough quality sleep, exposure to lead and asthma, joint pains, arthritis, problems with mobility and their feet, heart disease, hypertension, lung disease, sexual and reproductive health needs, and skin disorders.
- These conditions often go undiagnosed and untreated, due to lack of access to care and medication.

### *Mental and Behavioral Health Concerns*

- Respondents stressed the needs of homeless individuals who suffer from concurrent mental or behavioral health conditions that are often untreated. Opioid use is a significant concern.
- Families often have histories of trauma and mental health needs.
- One respondent mentioned the needs of homeless individuals who are survivors of domestic violence. Sometimes a partner has blocked or controlled access to care or medication. Other times, their partner has doled out medication as a reward, or kept the survivor under the influence of substances to make them more controllable.
- This abuse results in longer term health needs, including treatment and rehabilitation for substance use disorders.

### *Serving younger children*

- For very young children, respondents emphasized promoting breastfeeding among expectant moms, to offer protection against health risks of living in shelters.
- For children of domestic violence survivors, abusive partners blocking access to care affects children as well. Expectant mothers are often denied or blocked from receiving any prenatal care.
- Children, even infants, have experienced or witnessed significant trauma and violence that health care professionals need to be trained to recognize and address.
- Children with intellectual disabilities have particular challenges with shelter environments.
- Children experiencing homelessness have difficulty accessing health care, including vaccinations and screening. One respondent described a mother trying to make a new patient primary care appointment for her seven-month-old baby and being told there was no availability for over two months.
- Children also present with physical conditions such as asthma, some cases of lead poisoning, and significant dental issues. Respondents have seen rotting teeth, including baby teeth, due to poor nutrition and deferred dental care.

### *Serving older children*

- Among older children, key informants noted seeing early pregnancy in client populations.
- Older children are at risk for sex trafficking and victimization in exchange for securing a place to stay. Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS are resultant concerns.
- Mental health conditions are a significant concern, including the prevalence of depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, and “a lot of very egregious self-harm.”
- Respondents also described some substance use and substantial failure to thrive academically in school.
- LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the population of homeless youth and are at risk for bigotry, physical violence, and sexual violence.

#### *Serving older adults*

- Multiple respondents shared that age itself presents differently in homeless populations. People in their 50s and 60s have all the problems of more advanced age, are considered seniors by people who work with them, and are more likely to die within their 50s-60s than people in the general population.
- Experiencing homelessness may also compound mental and behavioral health conditions, as well as mobility issues, in these older adults.
- A compounding issue is that, despite advanced conditions and multiple hardships, these adults may not yet be eligible for housing and other benefits programs that are reserved for traditional categories of seniors (i.e., ages 65 and older).

#### *Access to care: navigation*

- Despite having health insurance, many people experiencing homelessness may depend on 911 or the emergency department (ED) for routine medical care. ED dependence may be due to transience placing people far from their original primary care office or patients not even knowing primary care is an option.
- Providers also need to be trained to recognize and address trauma, especially among children with mental health needs.
- Respondents noted system gaps when homeless patients leave care. Those who are not sick enough to stay in care, but are too sick to return to the shelter, often have nowhere to go. The burden for planning for these individuals can fall on community-based organizations or public services.
- Shelter services often feel unequipped to address special health care needs. Some people in shelter will delay important care, such as treatment or surgery, because they won't be able to deal with recovery while in shelter.
- Connecting patients to specialists is a challenge. People with significant trauma may have to endure wait times of 6-8 weeks for an initial behavioral health assessment.
- People experience stress, transience, and competing needs that make accessing care difficult. Barriers like not having enough minutes on a pre-paid phone to stay on hold with a provider can delay or prevent access.

#### *Access to care: bias and stigma*

- Multiple respondents described system failures related to bias and stigma for clients experiencing homelessness presenting with acute needs or severe injury. Despite case managers

advocating for them, these patients were turned away from EDs. These patients were dismissed as bed-seeking or med-seeking.

- In these cases, severe health problems were addressed later than they should have been, and in a few cases the patient died.
- Multiple respondents agreed they had witnessed this occurrence across multiple systems of care, even with veterans eligible for VA medical care. While they cautioned against overgeneralizing, they noted enough cases for it to be considered a serious and persistent issue.
- Patients who visit the ED also face stigma from staff and providers while there.

#### **Potential actions and solutions include:**

- Respondents stressed, above all else, that safe and stable places to live are the solution to homelessness. The right conversation is not about ameliorating symptoms and finding less harmful ways to live while homeless, but addressing root causes and providing housing.
- Insurance companies and hospitals have a role to play in creating housing, especially to meet needs of groups who are ineligible for other housing assistance.
- Engaging in community outreach that meets people where they are, to prevent those who delay care from experiencing crises. Respondents noted this is an especially important strategy in addressing the opioid crisis and preventing overdose.
- Provider training in trauma-informed care across health care settings. Respondents noted this was especially important for providers serving children.
- Investing in mental health and substance use services to ensure high quality facilities and well-trained staff.
- Information sharing and communication across the health care system, case managers, community-based organizations, and social services. For example, coordinating planning so that hospitals do not discharge people to shelter inappropriately, like fall risks or people who need assistance with activities of daily living.
- Investing in medical respite to provide an important intermediary step for people who are out of the health care system, but cannot be in shelter or on the street.
- Using models of care integration and co-location that offer holistic approaches to address housing, medical services, and workforce development opportunities to help people experiencing homelessness access and navigate services.

#### **Notable Quotations**

“When I was in elementary school, the solution to polio was not building more lung machines and giving more kids walkers. We all stood in a line and got a vaccine. And so that was the inoculation. Well, the inoculation for homelessness is not better shots, it's not better dental care, it's not even better mental health care or substance abuse care, all of which I agree on. The inoculation – the actual treatment – is housing.”

## People experiencing housing insecurity: Summary of major themes and health priorities

### *General health concerns: basic needs*

- Aging housing stock across all counties contributes to unsuitable living conditions in home environments. These include lack of running water, lack of heat, mold, asthma, lead paint, asbestos, and fire safety concerns.
- People experiencing housing instability are often under-resourced and cost-burdened. They may delay or divert resources that would otherwise go to food and healthcare to cover housing costs.
- The volume of need is increasing. Key informants shared that there are hundreds of people on their waitlists for housing or repairs within each of the counties, with wait times stretching up to five years. Renters with small-scale landlords are increasingly unable to complete effective, quality home repair.
- Families “don’t know what they don’t know.” If housing instability has been the norm, people may not turn to health care institutions for assistance.

### *General health concerns: physical, mental, and behavioral health*

- People with housing insecurity are “bowled over by different health issues,” including high rates of infection for communicable diseases, HIV, asthma, and hypertension.
- Substance use and mental health issues are rising issues, with key informants noting a precipitous incline in the last five years.
- Poverty, rising rent in appreciating neighborhoods, limited affordable housing, and the stress of evictions all create “a haze of stress” for those who are housing insecure.

### *Serving children*

- Housing and environment-related lead issues, extreme heat and cold, respiratory problems, and asthma all disproportionately affect young children.
- Precarious housing situations and frequent moves can lead to delayed care, like being late on immunizations, or having undiagnosed mental health conditions or learning disabilities.
- Other social determinants of health, such as food insecurity, also affect these children and can lead to conditions like obesity when children can’t access produce and healthy foods.
- Mental health, trauma, emotional neglect, limited social cohesion, physical neglect, school absenteeism, and are all additional effects of housing instability for children.
- Sex trafficking and sexual exchanges for places to stay or needed items affects teens and young adults who are housing insecure or homeless in multiple counties. These risks can also lead to sexually transmitted diseases or Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome.
- Neighborhood safety was identified as a concern, as are teens whose economic situations demand they work one or several part-time jobs, including overnight shifts.

### *Serving older adults*

- More and more seniors live in poor housing stock, nationally and in Philadelphia.

- Many cost-burdened seniors are faced with deteriorating, aging homes which they can't afford to repair. With many multi-story homes in the area, seniors are at risk for falls and injury. If they can't afford a refrigerator, they can't properly store medications like insulin. If they have a disability, they can't make the necessary modifications. Respondents shared stories of older clients returning home from the hospital and not being able to enter or leave the house because there are no front steps.
- Hoarding is a problem with seniors. One key informant shared their organization turns down about 20 percent of repairs because representatives can't access the home. Hoarding leads to other issues such as pests, fall risk, accessibility issues, and building condemnation.
- Respondents have observed seniors deteriorate within institutions, like nursing homes or hospitals, after losing housing and not be financially able to return.
- Competing needs such as transportation, food insecurity, and basic needs like showers can take the place of addressing more chronic issues such as mental health conditions and hypertension. Respondents also noted depression, social isolation, and behavioral health conditions among seniors.

#### *Access to care*

- Most people turn to the emergency department for care, rather than urgent or primary care, in some part because patients don't need cash on hand to access the ED.
- A lack of affordable housing forces people into poorer neighborhoods, where it may be harder to access care due to greater distances, safety concerns, or limited transportation.
- One barrier to care is difficulty maintaining health insurance and identification without a stable address. Some shelters offer post office or mailbox systems, but those systems are overwhelmed with need and there are delays in accessing them, meaning people miss deadlines for requirements necessary for obtaining services.
- People can feel mistrust for healthcare providers, or it may not occur to patients to disclose concurrent social challenges, leaving providers in the dark about conditions that are potentially hazardous to their health. Family priorities may also differ significantly from those of housing or healthcare providers, given multiple competing needs they face.

#### **Potential actions and solutions include:**

##### *Service Models and Partnerships*

- Multiple respondents stressed that housing is a health indicator and agreed that secure, stable, and safe housing is fundamental preventive care.
- Primary care providers should screen for housing insecurity and address it in care plans.
- Medical respite for people with substance use disorder offers a needed transitional space.
- Medical services for people who are on the street, and medical outreach into communities, can help to identify and address health concerns in the absence of people being able to regularly access robust care.
- Develop more medical-legal partnerships to support people with housing instability, especially in counties where they do not currently exist, like Bucks County.
- Address deficits in low-cost, simple interventions. A respondent noted that approximately 50 percent of the homes they evaluate in Philadelphia lack basic fire safety equipment such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.



- Integrate data across housing and health care provider partnerships, such that communication about housing conditions and health conditions is bidirectional.

### *Investments*

- Institutions can provide low-cost, flexible capital (e.g., 1% money from the institution for the city to leverage) and program-related investment (i.e., a grant with no financial return) to support shallow rent subsidies. Many respondents agreed these capital structures are needed. Rental subsidy programs for patients with high utilization would allow the system to place people in housing much more quickly.
- Hospitals should look at the Anchor Institution model and address neighborhoods as holistic entities, rather than through piecemeal approaches. This approach includes engaging directly with housing by creating new affordable units and facilitating repairs, and deploying resources and power, such as land and local workforce hiring practices.

### **Notable Quotations**

“...Mid-60s-year-old woman with diabetes. The roof leaked, it rotted through the second floor right to the kitchen, so she just kept closing doors on the house, right? She was cooking on a hot plate in the living room. How do we talk about access to healthcare? No matter what doctor or nurse practitioner prescribes, she’s cooking on a hot plate from the corner store, in a home that is rotted out.”

### **Individuals with Disabilities**

An individual can develop a disabling impairment or chronic condition at any point in life. Living with a disability often requires unique health and social supports. Understanding population level needs for individuals with disabilities can be challenging as they are often under-represented in population-based surveys and even efforts like community meetings. As a part of their CHNA, Magee Rehabilitation Hospital in Philadelphia developed and conducted a survey to assess the needs of their patients and others with disabilities related to physical and mental health, as well as access to and utilization of health and social services. Respondents reside throughout the greater Philadelphia region, including in Bucks, Chester, and Montgomery counties. About 90 percent of the 301 survey respondents were current or former patients at Magee, so responses are biased toward those receiving care at Magee and may not represent the larger community of adults with disabilities. Key findings include:

#### *Need for additional caregiver support for daily activities*

- 67% of respondents required personal assistance for major life activities, but 21% of those respondents reported that they were unable to get the help they needed for activities of daily living and driving to doctor appointments
- 67% of those requiring assistance reported that family members or friends generally provided the care they needed and were unpaid for these services

#### *Access to health screening and preventive health services*

- 32% rated their health as fair or poor compared to 19.2% of adults in Southeastern PA (2018 PHMC Household Health survey)
- 40% report chronic pain
- 50% had fallen within the past year
- 16% reported some level of food insecurity
- All but 4 respondents indicated that they had some form of health insurance (51% had Medicare, 23% had Medicaid, and 40% had access to private health insurance)
- 3% reported that they were not able to get the medications they needed (44% due to cost, 22% due to transportation issues) This compares favorably with the results from the 2018 PMHC HHS Adult survey where 13% reported an inability to get medications
- 25% do not see a dentist at least once per year. (This compares favorably with the results from the 2018 PMHC HHS Adult survey, where 30% reported that they do not see a dentist at least once per year.)
- 22% do not have access to psychological and/or counseling services, if needed.
- 31% reported having been diagnosed with a mental health condition. Of those, 38% were currently receiving treatment
- 45% had ever been screened for colon cancer compared to 77% of adults in Southeast PA (2018 PHMC Household Health survey)
- 24% of women had not had a pap smear within the past 3 years, and another 7% were unsure (This rate is similar to 2018 PMHC HHS Adult survey data)

- 26% of women had never had a mammogram, and only 33% had had one in the past two years. According to 2018 PHMC survey data for Southeastern PA, 5.8% of women had never had a mammogram and 76% had a mammogram in the past two years
- 33% of men had ever been screened for prostate cancer

#### *Opportunities for exercise*

- 13% reported participating in adaptive sports
- 34% report exercising 3 or more days per week, and another 24% exercise 2 days per week.
- 29% never exercise, and individuals indicated the following reasons: 16% due to cost, 19% due to lack of capability, 23% due to lack of knowledge about what exercise might be appropriate, 30% due to lack of access to a facility with appropriate equipment

#### *Accessible and affordable housing*

- 27% were not able to enter or leave their homes without assistance
- 16% reported that their housing did not meet their needs
- 28% reported that the sidewalks, curb cutouts and ramps in their neighborhoods were not in good condition or not present
- 16% reported a time in the last 12 months that they were not able to pay their mortgage, rent or utility bills

#### *Employment opportunities*

- 28% reported that disability did not limit their employment or ability to work
- 24% reported wages and earnings as their current source of income
- 35% received SSDI and 26% received Federal SSI
- 17% worked full-time, 9% worked part-time, and 25% were retired

## **Prenatal/postpartum women: Summary of major themes and health priorities**

### *Maternal Morbidity and Mortality*

- Physical conditions such as obesity, hypertension, gestational diabetes, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease were cited as affecting the morbidity and mortality of prenatal and postpartum women.
- Cardiovascular deaths and substance overdoses are contributing to maternal mortality.

### *Root Causes and Competing Issues: Poverty, Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, Bias, and Trauma*

- Many women are concurrently experiencing issues such as poverty, food insecurity, housing insecurity, or domestic violence during pregnancy.
- These issues are often accompanied by a history of trauma, which may be exacerbated by bias or discrimination within the health care system. Informants said that many providers and other health system staff are not trained in providing trauma-informed care.

### *Access to Mental and Behavioral Health Care*

- Key informants across the counties strongly emphasized that one of the most significant needs for prenatal and postpartum women is timely access to quality mental and behavioral health care.
- Opioid overdoses are contributing to maternal mortality, especially in the fourth trimester period.
- Mental health needs are broader than depression alone and may include anxiety, past trauma, and partner counseling.
- Informants shared that many providers are unequipped to provide mental and behavioral health care to women while pregnant. Needs that existed before pregnancy, such as medication regimens for psychological conditions, are not always readdressed after pregnancy.

### *Access to Postpartum Care*

- Access to postpartum follow-up visits is a significant challenge for women, with many contributing barriers.
- Missed postpartum follow-up visits can lead to missed opportunities to provide continuity of care for women addressing chronic conditions (like cardiovascular health), as well as missed opportunities to arrange family planning and address mental/behavioral health needs.
- If a woman has delivered a healthy child or has already acquired contraception, she may not prioritize follow-up in the face of other competing needs, such as caring for her newborn, arranging childcare, juggling work schedules, and securing transportation.

### *Underlying Barriers to Access*

- Multiple informants said that appointment availability is a significant barrier to all types of care. Women who need referrals are frequently redirected and may encounter significant wait times.

- Respondents agreed that transportation access affects access to care, and sometimes women need to take three modes of transportation to get to a single appointment.
- Chester County and Montgomery County informants stressed that transportation is a significant barrier, with unique challenges due to lack of accessibility by foot or public transit.
- Chester County and Montgomery County informants discussed difficulties in providing linguistically appropriate care for women who speak languages of lesser diffusion. Stress surrounding immigration status, a fear of deportation, and undocumented women being ineligible for public benefits all contribute to limited access.
- Barriers of language access and transportation can often intersect in these counties, when women who do not speak English are in high-risk prenatal situations and have to be transported to Philadelphia for care.

**Potential actions and solutions include:**

- Multiple respondents emphasized that it is crucial for providers to be trained in trauma-informed care.
- Expansion of in-home or mobile services such as psychological counseling, family or couples therapy, and substance use counseling.
- Hospital support for transportation assistance.
- Support for women when they are ready to receive care by increasing appointment availability and employing staff to help schedule appointments.
- Greater collaboration in case coordination and care management to help address underlying barriers to access. Recommended methods to increase coordination included:
  - Expanding use of health care workers, like community health workers and doulas.
  - Encouraging providers to provide prenatal, rather than postpartum, referrals to community-based services.
  - Multiple respondents agreed that co-location of comprehensive health care services would significantly reduce barriers for women receiving care. A single location where women could access obstetric, primary, and pediatric care along with lab and imaging services was considered ideal.

**Notable quotations:**

“Even for my own self with not as many barriers, I’m more apt to do anything if I can just do it when I’m ready. So if I’m calling to do ultrasound, bloodwork, whatever it is, if it’s available and there, you’re more apt to just go and do it. If you’re waiting for months or getting it put off, you can’t get the appointment because of X, Y, and Z, you’re just more apt to either not go or not show up when you do make the appointment.”

“The high rate of maternal mortality and morbidity is of great concern certainly in Philadelphia. The rising number of opiate overdoses is really a significant contributing factor to maternal death in our city, especially in the last two years.”

“Just after giving birth, it’s a very vulnerable period. Even if they’re not dealing with postpartum depression, they might be much more emotional and the fact of having a newborn baby and maybe other children and getting to that appointment, I think that might definitely be a factor of why we see such a low turnout.”

“Unaddressed mental health issues, and the impact of substance use and opiates, and domestic violence. As well as economic and environmental issues, whether it be housing, food insecurity...and also the experience of bias and racism within the systems of care.”

I. Immigrant Population:

a. General Findings:

- i. Immigrants in Philadelphia make up about 15% of the population. Many of them are deterred from applying for public benefits or necessary programs that provide necessities, such as health care and food, because they are afraid that their application process will divulge information to federal immigration officials about who they are and where they are living, even if they are eligible immigrants (Johnson, 2018).
- ii. Nearly 40% of the non-citizen immigrant population is uninsured, which is over four times the rate of the general population (phila.gov)
- iii. 36.5% of Hispanics rate their health as “fair” or “poor” in response to the question, “In general, would you say that your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?” compared to 23.6% for the total population in Philadelphia (phila.gov)
- iv. 25.8% Black non-Hispanics have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and currently smoke “every day” or “some days.” compared to 22.4% for the total population in Philadelphia (phila.gov)
- v. Philadelphia Refugee Health Collaborative conducted a needs assessment within the refugee community (General Refugee Health, 2015):
  1. Background:
    - a. Many refugees arrive with significant medical conditions including injuries from war, infectious diseases, and unmanaged, chronic health conditions. Refugees also experience emotional trauma resulting from war, displacement and loss of loved ones and status, and are frequently diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health conditions.
  2. Women’s Health Needs:
    - a. Desire for family planning education, increased need for community education and women’s rights, fear health effects of contraception, transportation, need for culturally competent and limited health literacy
  3. Geriatric Refugee Needs:
    - a. Health and Functional Status – difficulty managing conditions, health literacy, navigating health insurance
    - b. Social Roles and Activities – decreased social engagement, poor mobility, lack of activity
    - c. Sources of Stress – language barriers, concerns for family members, environment, financial uncertainty
    - d. Knowledge of and Access to Programming – language barriers
  4. Congolese Needs:

- a. Basic Needs and Support – concern about not having enough money to cover basic expenses
  - b. Nutrition – concerned food stamps are not enough to cover the entire family
  - c. Health Care – difficulties with follow-up and specialist appointments
- b. Burmese, Bhutanese and Iraqi:
  - i. A team from Thomas Jefferson University conducted a qualitative health needs assessment among Burmese and Bhutanese refugees residing in South Philadelphia in 2013. Common themes from key informant interviews were health issues, such as dental care, eye care, common health conditions like Vitamin B12 deficiency, diabetes, hypertension, etc. Barriers to addressing these health issues included transportation, language, health care navigation and time. Lastly, influences on health were shown to be nutrition, exercise, smoking, stress and alcohol (Tolu-Ajayi, 2015).
    - 1. A quote from a Burmese Church pastor in South Philadelphia reveals their idea of health when he says, “health for them is traditionally if you can sleep well, eat well, look a bit fat and walk”.
  - ii. Health assessment of community-based service needs of elderly Iraqi and Bhutanese refugees living in Philadelphia in 2015 show that language barriers, difficulty managing health conditions, and mobility were challenges that lead to overarching issues such as chronic dependency on family members and social isolation (Matteucci, 2015).
- c. East and Southeast Asian:
  - i. The city’s newest East and Southeast Asian residents are struggling to find places to receive safety and support in the community. Many of them, though, have recently found Buddhist centers across the city to be welcoming, and they provide legal aid, tax assistance, soup kitchen document translation, English classes and other services. Many populations are served by these Buddhist centers, including African, Latino, and Eastern European populations (Chinn, 2019).
  - ii. Among 330,000 Philadelphia area residents who do not speak English very well, 5.8% speak Vietnamese, but that language is spoken by less than 1% of local physicians. This shortage, according to VietLead, a nonprofit community group for Philadelphians of Vietnamese origin, is especially acute among physician specialists and mental health professionals. This a problem in a community where some older immigrants suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Avril, 2017).
- d. Muslim:
  - i. There are over 75,000 Muslims who live in Philadelphia, and about 60% of them live in poverty. Furthermore, 25% lack health insurance, 30% report cost as a barrier to healthcare access and 20% have no access to healthcare whatsoever.



Recently a Muslim-run health clinic opened in North Philadelphia, called Social Health and Medical Services (SHAMS), with the mission of providing health services to anyone without health insurance or cannot afford co-pays, as well as alleviating the effect of socioeconomic disadvantages on the health and social well-being of Philadelphians. The Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) primarily funds the clinic (Yaacov, 2018).

e. African and Caribbean:

- i. About one in four Philadelphia children are immigrants or first-generation Americans. The African Family Health Organization (AFAHO) noticed an influx of immigrant, refugee and asylee Caribbean and African youth, specifically in West Philadelphia, and that many of them were not English-proficient, lacked knowledge of reproductive and sexual health and experienced bullying in the school systems. AFAHO began summer programs two years ago for these immigrant youth to help create a safe environment for them to discuss their hardships, improve self-esteem, and educate the youth on sexual and reproductive health, English, and how to assimilate into American life while maintaining their ethnic identity (Smythe, 2018).
- ii. Black Men and Boys: Philadelphia has seen significant, positive changes in health outcomes over the years, but black men and boys still lag far behind, showing a need to address various underlying causes of poor health ("Brotherly Love", 2019).
  1. Homicides, early heart disease and accidents (including drug overdoses) are the leading causes of premature death among black men in Philadelphia. Homicide is the leading cause of death for black men between the ages of 15 to 34.
  2. Black youth are three times as likely to die before the age of 20 than white youth in Philadelphia.
  3. Hospitalizations for asthma in black youth are nine times higher than those of white youth. This can lead to absenteeism, which can worsen the already existing disparities in education.
  4. History of discrimination has led black men wary of seeking care and finding care in providers who may not be trustworthy, leading to worsened health outcomes. Studies have found that black men are more likely to follow black male physicians' recommendations, but the rate of black physicians across the country.
  5. Factors that impact these health outcomes include poverty, as 23 percent of black men live in poverty in the city, adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and exposure to community violence and trauma.
    - a. Black men are more likely to experience ACE than white men, specifically experiencing living in single parent households or having an incarcerated parent
  6. Needs include:

- a. decrease in violence – violence reduction strategies
  - b. reduce deterrents – such as neighborhood saturation of unhealthy food and excess tobacco and alcohol outlets
  - c. promote healthy living – promote primary care and preventative services among black men
  - d. ensure access – affordable and accessible physical and behavioral health care from trusted providers
  - e. strengthen education – connecting disconnected black men and boys to educational and employment opportunities
  - f. provide a healthy start – preventative health services, healthy living spaces and social supports
- f. Hispanic/Latino Populations:
  - i. Number of hospitalizations that are potentially preventable continues to decline, but rates are twice as high among non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics (phila.gov)
  - ii. Latino Homeless Paradox: Latinos are more likely to live on the streets or spend nights at friends' houses than enter into a homeless shelter (Terruso and Restrepo, 2019).
    - 1. The poverty rate is 38% among Latinos (the highest for racial and ethnic groups in the city) and they make up 15% of the city's population, but in 2018, only 12% of people who used Office of Homeless Services were Latino and only 9% of people in Philadelphia homeless shelters were Latino and just 7% of vouchers from the Philadelphia Housing Authority went to Latinos (Terruso and Restrepo, 2019).
    - 2. This is because of language barriers, because available beds are not in their neighborhoods, and because of a cultural tendency for Latino family members or friends to all live together before letting them go to a homeless shelter.
      - a. This is very common in Puerto Rican culture
    - 3. Latinos in the city are missing out on help and programs
      - a. There is a lack of Latino physicians in the Philadelphia area. Less than 3% of doctors in Philadelphia are Latino (Neil, 2019).
  - iii. Latino cancer community – many Latino cancer patients need help with health insurance issues, scheduling mammograms, finding outside support, finding transportation to their appointments, etc. Not many cancer support groups in Philadelphia area are tailored to Spanish-speaking individuals or individuals with other cultural beliefs, like Latinos (Correa, 2019).
  - iv. Among Hispanic teenage girls between the ages of 15-19, the birth rate per 1,000 was 58.9% compared to 43.1% for Black, non-Hispanics and 34.9% in the total population in Philadelphia.
  - v. 18.3% of Hispanics, age 18-64 years, answered “yes” to the question, “In the past year, has there been any time when you were sick or injured AND did not

seek health care because of the cost?” compared to 13.4% for the total population in Philadelphia.

- vi. 29.6% of Hispanic adults answered “yes” to the question, “Have you ever been diagnosed with any mental health condition, including clinical depression, anxiety disorder or bipolar disorder?” compared to 20.8% of the total population in Philadelphia.
- vii. 39.2% of Hispanics have an income below 100% of the federal poverty level (FPL) compared to 25.8% for the total population in Philadelphia.
- viii. 53.3% of Hispanics students graduate from high school within four years after starting 9th grade, compared to 64.8% in the total population in Philadelphia.

## II. Geographical Areas:

### a. West Philadelphia:

- i. Ambulatory Care Sensitive Hospitalization rates per 100,000 by zip code were higher among residents in West and North Philadelphia (Phila.gov)
- ii. The “Promise Zone” is a group of neighborhoods in West Philadelphia that were designated by the federal government in 2014 based on poverty, unemployment, housing, education and violence (Otto, 2017)
  - 1. Studies on this area have shown that 19% of Promise Zone residents are uninsured, compared to 13% in the entire city.
  - 2. Residents of the Promise zone rated their health “fair/poor” 30% of the time, while the rest of the city rated their health “fair/poor” 23% of the time.
  - 3. Percentage of residents living in “distressed” housing is more than twice the Philly average, 19 to 8 percent. This disparity is more evident when you consider homes “most distressed”; it is a four-fold difference with Promise Zone coming in at 24% compared to 6% in the rest of the city (Otto, 2017).

### b. Southern Philadelphia:

- i. A study conducted by the Scattergood Foundation, called “Place Matters”, uses mapping software to highlight areas that are underserved by mental health providers, specifically looking at young children. The data included crime, poverty and unemployment figures, Medicaid claim data from DBHIDS, education levels and ACE data. Results of the study show that there are large discrepancies in health outcomes among zip codes in Philadelphia, and in South Philadelphia alone, roughly 2,971 children who were in need of mental health services were not getting those services. More broadly, there are about 272,000 children in Philadelphia under the age of 17 who are Medicaid eligible. 54,000 of those children may be in need of behavioral and mental health services within the Community Behavioral Health network, but only 33,700 children were served this care in 2015. Furthermore, out of Philadelphia’s 46 zip codes, 36 fell below the national average for mental health service needs (Scattergood Foundation, 2017).

- ii. Clusters of neighborhoods in the Northeast and Southwest regions have fewer primary care providers (PCPs) and availability for primary care appointments is the lowest (phila.gov).
  - iii. Food Insecurity:
    - 1. In Grays Ferry neighborhood, the food insecurity rate is 42.2 percent versus in Queen Village, where the food insecurity rate is 8.6 percent (Maiorano, 2019).
- c. Northern Philadelphia:
  - i. Philadelphia has 46 community health centers, but only one is located in Northeast Philadelphia (phila.gov)
  - ii. A study conducted by the Scattergood Foundation, called “Place Matters”, uses mapping software to highlight areas that are underserved by mental health providers, specifically looking at young children. The data included crime, poverty and unemployment figures, Medicaid claim data from DBHIDS, education levels and ACE data. Results of the study show that there are large discrepancies in health outcomes among zip codes in Philadelphia, as well (Scattergood Foundation, 2016).
  - iii. Lower Northeast:
    - 1. 17% of women living in Lower Northeast received prenatal care either in the third trimester or not at all, out of all women for whom the timing of prenatal care is known
    - 2. The mortality rate in Lower Northeast is 10.700 per 1,000 live births under the age of one
    - 3. 73.3% of women living in Lower Northeast initiated breastfeeding before hospital discharge (out of all women for whom breastfeeding status is known) compared to 94.3% in central Philadelphia.
  - iv. In North Philadelphia, the teen birth rate is 56.400 teen births per 1,000 teens 15-19 years of age
  - v. Asthma is a significant health concern for children in Philadelphia, and the rate of asthma-related hospitalizations has declined to 58.8 hospitalizations per 10,000 children in 2016, however the rate remains high in non-Hispanic Blacks and Hispanic children who have 5 to 6 times higher rates than that of non-Hispanic white children.
    - 1. These rates were highest in children residing in upper North and West Philadelphia

### III. Primary Care Access

- a. Overall supply of PCPs continues to rise, but the number of PCPs who accept Medicaid has declined in recent years (phila.gov)
  - i. Availability of primary care appointments is lower and wait times are longer for individuals in Philadelphia who are on Medicaid, compared to those who are privately insured (phila.gov)

- b. Communities of low-income or high proportions of racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to experience low numbers of PCPs (phila.gov)

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## **Methods:**

We held four focus groups in February 2019 to better understand the health priorities of the community in which Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) serves. We held two of these focus groups at the Karabots (4 participants) and South Philadelphia (4 participants) Care Sites with non-clinical CHOP employees who are parents of children 21 years and younger and live within the zip codes designated by the larger Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). We held the other two focus groups with adolescents ages 14-21 from [The Attic Youth Center](#) (6 participants) and [Achieving Independence Center \(AIC\)](#) (7 participants). The majority of youth participants were over 18. Employees from CHOP's PolicyLab led the discussion and analysis of each focus group.

## **Adolescent Focus Group Findings:**

The focus groups we held with adolescents yielded two major themes: 1) they do not receive comprehensive sex and general health education and 2) violence and bullying persist within their communities.

### *Lack of Sex Education*

In both adolescent focus groups, youth expressed that sex education was lacking during their time in school and into their early adulthood. Participants noted that sex education provided in schools was heteronormative and limited to the description of female and male anatomy:

*"When it comes to sexual health, it's very vague and they're usually talking about heterosexual sex. But you often need to educate all different types of sex. It's the lack of empathy for us. It's the lack of a home for us in these schools. And it's like we're not learning about our sexual health – one, because it's not there, but two, because we're worried about being teased, being harassed, being messed with, hit on and so many other things that it's like what does it matter?"*

They reported a dearth of information on safe sex practices, especially in the context of the LGBTQ+ community in which they experience different sexual health needs in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts:

*"I've seen a lot of students advocating saying hey, we're queer individuals and we don't even know our bodies like that... So why aren't we being educated in that certain format, in that certain way in schools, or just as a problem within the community-base that you can bring people together to educate them on these certain topics?"*

Focus group participants noted that they learned the majority of their health information through peer interactions and the internet—specifically citing using trusted government sources for their sexual health information. Youth also reported that members of their community use social media and pornography as a resource for learning healthy sexual practices, which could be misleading and cause a further disconnection from healthy behaviors.

Participants also reported a lack of cultural competency by medical providers (e.g., not respecting preferred pronouns, not being educated on health needs of transgender individuals), which has led to a general mistrust of the medical community. Adolescents reported feeling stigmatized by medical providers when disclosing their sexual identity during appointments. One participant said,

*“When I went to doctor’s to get checked up and my doctor asked me who were you having sex with, girls or boys, and I said girls, it’s like she looked at me in a certain way and it was like wow, I’m being shamed for liking girls or something like that.”*

As a result, youth have turned to those within their communities to get their health information as opposed to going to a medical professional.

#### *Lack of General Health information*

In addition to lacking sexual health information, youth reported they did not receive enough general health information. Adolescents seek the majority of this health education through conversations with peers, the internet, and by watching YouTube videos on exercise routines and healthy eating. One participant noted that the most comprehensive nutrition education they received was through their job in food preparation services at a health food establishment:

*“I’ve learned a lot from my job actually with health. Working at [location extracted]. It educated me on a lot of things as far as like what’s better for you, and then seeing other people who come in there, having all different types of clientele...Hummus, quinoa, avocado, chickpeas. It’s all down the list of healthy stuff people love to eat.”*

#### *Violence and Bullying within Communities*

Within this larger theme, youth spent a lot of time discussing social media. One participant stated,

*“I feel like social media takes a big part in health, because people are depressed because they think filters – oh, I’m not pretty like this girl.”*

Youth felt that social media is responsible for perpetuating interpersonal conflict and disseminating violent images. The participants stated that it is common to see fights between peers posted on social media, in addition to their peers being violent with others in the community. Youth felt that fighting within social media apps often leads to verbal or physical fights in-person. One young person stated,

*“I feel like a lot of that stems into mental health, too, because a lot of the things that we see on social media, like people doing drugs, people overdosing, people getting into fights, fighting and stuff like that – our generation, that’s normal to us.”*

Youth also commonly see gun violence on social media, as well as within the communities that they live. Some youth reported not feeling safe going outside after a certain time of night and being hyper-aware of the dangers of being a person of color in certain areas of the city at nighttime. One participant said,

*“Guns – that’s all you see, 24/7.”*

Both focus groups heavily discussed violence within communities and school settings. They shared that they commonly witnessed verbal and physical harassment among youth of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with a lack of response from school administrators or other authority figures. Youth who reported this harassment noted that it could and has led to mental health conditions such as depression and suicidal thoughts.

#### **Adolescent Focus Group Recommendations:**



Based on the health priorities outlined by the focus group participants, we propose several recommendations:

### **1. Provide comprehensive sexual education provided across the lifespan**

In order to increase safe sex practices and reduce unwanted pregnancies, schools and youth-serving community centers should adopt more comprehensive sexual health education lessons that are inclusive of sexual- and gender-minority youth. Additionally, primary care providers should provide sexual health information that is age-appropriate and inclusive of various gender and sexual identities.

### **2. Promote responsible use of social media**

In order to reduce the amount of interpersonal conflicts and depiction of violent images, we recommend that schools and youth-serving organizations provide education regarding responsible and safe use of social media. Parental controls can also be another resource for reducing harmful images from reaching children and adolescents.

Additionally, research investment into the effects of social media can help provide a broader context of this issue and what parents, teachers, and medical professionals can do in order to help remedy its harmful effects.

### **3. Employ social workers in schools**

Ensuring the co-location of social workers within schools would help to reduce barriers and access to services such as those for mental health. Social workers should also practice trauma-informed care as many youth reported past experiences that may warrant a trauma-informed approach.

### **4. Increase clinical provider education**

We recommend increasing education within the medical community in order to more effectively serve and treat LGBTQ+ youth. This education should be added to both the medical school curriculum and continuing education for licensed physicians as youth have reported deliberately avoiding care due to fear of judgement by medical providers. This additional training should also incorporate the principles of trauma-informed care considering many youth report previous traumatic events that would warrant tailored medical care.

### **Employee Focus Group Findings:**

The two focus groups held with CHOP employees with children under 21 years of age and who live in zip codes designated by the larger CHNA, yielded six important themes: difficulty navigating health care systems and services, lack of access to health care and resources for preventive health, parenting challenges, chronic health issues, mistrust of systems/vulnerable populations, and available community assets.

#### *Difficulty Navigating Health Care Systems and Services*

Participants spoke of personal and observed experiences with difficulty navigating the health care system. They voiced that challenges navigating health care systems often first arise when families apply for insurance and interact with insurance companies. They discussed that for low-income families with

low educational attainment, navigating the processes to attain insurance coverage can be complicated and burdensome. One participant noted,

*“I feel fortunate enough to know a couple of people who know about insurances...that I can go to and ask questions – I feel like the more educated you are, the more you know [and] the more resources you have. But it’s not that easy for some people. They don’t even know where to start”.*

This in turn leads families to be unaware of benefits that come with their health care coverage, such as a discounted YMCA membership. An additional subtheme was that of determining the appropriate health care provider to visit for their children’s health needs. Participants reported that knowing when to visit a primary care clinic vs. urgent care vs. emergency department is a major point of confusion for many parents.

Furthermore, participants discussed that a lack of understanding on how to locate resources contributes to families’ difficulties in navigating systems. They spoke of a variety of community-based health promotion and prevention resources (e.g., childcare included in YMCA membership, no-charge contraception counseling at neighborhood clinic) that families are unaware of how to access. They felt that parents with low educational attainment are more likely to be unaware of community resources to benefit them and their family. Specially, participants identified that adolescent parents and parents with low education attainment struggled to understand the importance of prioritizing preventive care, such as well-child visits and vaccinations. They noted that there was an intergenerational component to parents’ beliefs about the importance of preventive care. Employees felt that, “if people knew their options and how to actually advocate for themselves and where you can go,” than parents would be more empowered with the tools and information to make healthy decisions for their children.

#### *Access to Health Care and Resources for Preventive Health*

Participants noted that a lack of personal identification documents poses a barrier to health care access. Families who move often and don’t have proof of residence or birth certificates may encounter difficulties in applying for health care coverage and other social services:

*“When a person moves around so much from place to place and they don’t have a whole lot of personal belongings, it’s very easy for things to get lost. So especially those kind of documents, I mean, you can’t get an ID without an ID, or birth certificate without an ID or a license without an ID. If you don’t have an ID but then you need a birth certificate, you don’t have that either, it’s like how do you obtain one or the other because you need the other. It’s hard.”*

Participants expressed that barriers often stand in the way of accessing health care and components of preventive health, such as healthy food options and opportunities for physical activity. They noted an abundance of corner stores within walking distance while the number of supermarkets selling fruits and vegetables in their communities was limited. They noted that families often find themselves buying less nutritious foods at corner stores because it is the convenient option. Several employees agreed that there’s “not really healthy food available that’s close by.” Participants also tied neighborhood safety to walkability, mentioning that even if supermarkets or recreation centers were within walking distance, it is not always safe to walk to them. One participant stated that,

*“a lot of kids are kept indoors nowadays because of the crime rates. Kids used to go outside and play, now they’re stuck indoors playing videogames, and not getting the exercise they need. They’re not being socially active and that’s why there’s more obesity.”*

### Parenting challenges

*Reflections on Observed Patient/Family Challenges.* Participants also went into detail about the variety of co-existing challenges that come with raising multiple children, especially in single-parent households. They discussed that often parents have to choose which child’s health is the priority, which can have consequences for the entire family. One child’s sick visit may take priority over the other’s annual check-up, which may lead to that child not being allowed at child care when they aren’t up to date on immunizations. They also spoke to the complicated nature of juggling children’s health visits with meeting other basic family needs. One participant gave the example that if a parent is struggling to pay the utility bill, scheduling preventive care visits is not a priority,

*“You’re trying to make the kid an appointment, but that’s over now, because now your utilities are being shut off...It pushes the health and welfare of your children down because you’ve got to worry about their priorities.”*

Scheduling challenges with multiple children also plays a role. A participant gave the example,

*“If all the kids cannot be seen on that particular day – nine times out of ten they’re not showing up because [the parent] can’t keep missing work or come in a few days a week to have all their kids being seen.”*

### *Reflections on personal challenges as a caregiver*

One of the primary themes that came up in both focus groups was participants reflecting on the challenges they face as caregivers when raising their own children. One of the concerns expressed related to child well-being was that of parenting in the age of social media and technology. Participants discussed the role social media plays in a child’s feeling of acceptance among their peers. They also struggled with wanting their children to have access to the benefits of technology (e.g., texting with parents) while worrying that even limited internet access may lead to their children accessing inappropriate and harmful content.

### *Chronic Health Issues*

The most common health issues in children addressed among employee participants were asthma, obesity, and heart-related conditions. Long-time community residents reported noticing more children with these chronic conditions now than in previous years, and spoke to some of the environmental and social factors they believe are related. Lack of access to convenient and affordable places to buy nutritious foods and to exercise were among the primary reasons why participants believe obesity and heart-related issues have become prevalent among children in their communities. Participants brought up pollution, secondhand smoke, and lack of awareness of symptoms as drivers of asthma flare-ups among children. They reported that parents are often unaware that secondhand smoke can trigger asthmatic children even if the adult is smoking outside or in another room. Similarly, they noted that misinformation on the signs and symptoms of asthma flare-ups may be a result of missing well-child visits, and therefore not receiving important information from their child’s pediatrician.

### *Mistrust of Systems/Vulnerable Populations*

Participants discussed their observation that patients seemed to mistrust systems, especially populations who are vulnerable and have historically been oppressed. They discussed addressing families' fears and confusion surrounding the health care and child welfare system. Participants indicated that these beliefs often stem from anecdotes passed on by friends, family members, and other community members. One example described was hesitancy among parents to bring their children in for sick visits for fear that the Department of Human Services (DHS) may become involved. Participants also felt that when parents fail to attend well-child visits, they miss a crucial chance to build a trusting relationship with their primary care provider. This may lead to mistrust of information from their child's doctor, other health care providers, and the health care system in general.

Group participants felt that mistrust of systems was most prevalent in families with limited English proficiency. They mentioned that communication barriers and a lack of patience among front-line staff might prevent families from seeking health care, insurance coverage, and other services:

*"I think a lot of families, especially – I don't want to say new immigrants, but new people coming in. They don't speak much English, it's going to be very difficult for them to communicate. And if no one has the patience, then they're not going to know what to do. They're going to feel scared. They're going to feel embarrassed and they're going to feel like you know what? I have nobody to help me."*

**Community Assets** Despite the identified community health concerns, participants in both groups spoke of many community assets. They identified churches, YMCAs, and libraries as places that host events and offer resources to connect community members to other organizations and services. They identified walkability, while limited in certain places, as a positive overall. Participants mentioned that having recreation centers, green space, and libraries within walking distance made their community a good place to raise a family.

### **Employee Focus Group Recommendations:**

Based on the health priorities and expressed concerns outlined by the focus group participants, we propose several recommendations:

#### **1. Conduct community resource mapping**

Hospital systems should create a centralized, inclusive, and well-advertised source of health information which would allow for more families and health providers to be aware of available, affordable, and vetted services.

#### **2. Address food insecurity and sparse availability of affordable and healthy groceries**

When considering community benefit programs, hospitals should consider how to immediately and systematically address hunger in our communities. Immediate solutions to this program could include school meals, healthy snacks at providers' offices, etc. When weighing community benefit decisions, hospitals should consider identifying and investing in solutions that address food access and education surrounding preparation of low-cost, nutritious meals.

#### **3. Employ multilingual community health workers to help families navigate health care systems**

Given the shortcomings of health systems in providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services for patients, we recommend: 1) employing multilingual community health workers and 2) conducting trainings and enacting protocols on the importance of adhering to best practices as outlined by language service departments.

#### **4. Promote responsible social media use**

Providers should leverage the most recent best practices on social media use and screen time to incorporate coaching and preventative education during well-child visits on healthy social media behaviors and they can provide parents with guidance on behavioral health issues as a result of the effects of social media. Parental controls and monitoring are additional avenues for preventing harm and misuse.

#### **5. Establish health system policies that are informed by common patient barriers**

Single parents with multiple children face several barriers to bringing their children in for well visits. If clinics cannot accommodate all of the patients in the same day, parents will often not attend the appointments due to inflexible work schedules and lack of additional caregiver support. Continual missing of appointments leads to insufficient preventative care, out-of-date vaccinations, and at times the inability to enroll in school or daycare. Therefore, health systems should collect additional data on barriers to accessing and attending health appointments in order to further inform their policies.