

**2022 Regional Community Health Needs Assessment:
Geographic Community Conversation Summary: North Penn and Lansdale
[Montgomery County]**

Community Assets

Participants value many resources in their community, especially the **built environment and local organizations**:

- *“In Lansdale [we have] a bunch of parks and public spaces, and it definitely helps me and my family stay healthy, and ... that's what we using mostly daily for ... fun, just breathe fresh air and walk around and relax, and look at greens and trees.”*
- *“We have a lot of nonprofits in the area that meet many needs of people in the community; Manna comes to mind, as they feed many people in the community.”*
- *“We have two really nice YMCAs: the Indian Valley and North Penn.”*
- *“I was thinking about the positives that we have in our faith community. Not only is there a church or synagogue or a mosque on every corner, they're really invested in the community.”*
- Another participant mentioned the Asian American Coalition for COVID, with members from Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, Filipino, and other Asian American heritages.

Other community assets that were highlighted:

- *“I think we have good school districts where our students can get support and disseminate information through the students into the families.”*
- *“I'd be shortchanging our community if I didn't talk about the excellent health care that we have with the hospitals that we're surrounded by.”*
- *“In Lansdale Borough, ...local police officers get together and they brainstorm ways of helping some of the more marginalized folks in our community. So, I think their investment in the community is important as well.”*
- *“We have a lot of great corporations in our community.”*

Key Challenges

Top concerns are behavioral health issues, including substance use, for youth and adults. Growing demand for behavioral health services is far exceeding the capacity for treatment, with **insurance barriers and lack of affordable care** compounding this health crisis.

- *“So, we have all these people calling [our] 24-hour crisis hotline who need services, and can't get them, because either they don't have coverage [or] the provider doesn't take the insurance. The call volume has far exceeded anything we've ever experienced ever, to the point where we can't even accept any new cases for children at all.”*
- *“We have seen an uptick in substance use, like we've never seen, with the kids being home and isolated with them having access to the internet where they could buy drugs online. There's been deaths in the community from kids that have been buying drugs that they thought were Percocet or Valium, but they're being made in somebody's basement and they have fentanyl. So, it's an epidemic inside a pandemic, to say the least.”*
- *“I don't know what the solution is, but ... people need to be able to access those services, because otherwise they're triaging themselves and saying, ‘I can't get help and I'm not even going to try’ and it's making situations worse.”*

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Stigma surrounding mental health is another common barrier to seeking care. Among many Asian Americans, for example, *“there’s such a big stigma around mental health counseling, that a lot of times, the Asian American community members will ignore it, or say it’s something that I have to deal with, or even if it’s dealing with their kids, the parents may reject that idea, and not get the support that they may need.”*

Language and cultural barriers are other obstacles for some, especially immigrants who do not speak English as their primary language:

- *“Speaking from the Asian American community, there’s not enough bilingual and bicultural or even multicultural providers. We have mental health counseling service, but the demand is high, it’s always been high for mental health counselors [but] not enough people, [and] when you look for people who can speak different language, and have a cultural understanding, very, very few around.”*
- *“This is not just in mental health service, I feel like it’s the issue all across with physical therapists, OT, speech therapist, even nurses and doctors, there’s shortage of people who speak multiple languages and understand the cultural background that affects people’s mental and physical health. Language Line is not always a good solution. But sometimes, even the interpreting services that are put in place are not so easy to utilize from the community with language barrier, especially the seniors.”*

Further limiting health care access: one participant observed that **fewer providers are available**, with some taking early retirement and others shifting into “concierge” practices. *“I’ve been noticing a lot with our seniors [that] a lot of the primary care doctors, and specialists for that matter, have retired in the last year. I think that they’re just some were ready to retire [and] others just probably retired early. So, we’re having a lot of problems getting specialist appointments, they’re months out.”*

Children and Youth

Lack of a healthy diet and too little physical activity were discussed as additional issues for children and youth, with concern as well about the prevalence of **obesity in youth and adults**:

- *“I think a very big health issue in our community and nationwide is obesity, and the lack of education as far as healthy eating goes. I think maybe the lack of the ability to get healthy food, it’s very, very cheap to eat unhealthy, but if you want to eat the healthy things, it’s twice as much money to buy those things.”*
- *“As mother of a baby, ... one of the concerns for me is school food, which I ... think it’s super unhealthy.”*
- *“The other issue that goes along with school food is just my children, the amount of – the lack of time they get to run around during the day, the recess. They’re sitting, like so much, and their backpacks are like 35 pounds, and then they just sit all day. ... I always wish there was more movement, I guess that’s my theme, movement.”*

With **mental health issues among youth as a top concern**, one participant commented that **students are often reluctant to seek help from school counselors or their parents**.

Commenting on a survey done several years ago, she said: *“So, I don’t know if parents need*

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more education as well, awareness about healthy relationships and social and emotional learning and support.”

Older Adults

Social isolation, which has worsened during the pandemic, is taking a toll on older adults’ mental and physical health:

- *“For seniors, it’s definitely a mental health issue that they’re so isolated, and they are afraid to reach out sometimes. They used to come into our centers and connect with people and be active and do healthy things, and they just were cut off [by the pandemic].”*
- In the Asian American community, fear of discrimination has further increased isolation. *“With the anti-Asian sentiments ... and fear of COVID, the seniors are limiting going out of their homes, they’re staying home, which limits their movement, so physically, it’s not good for them. Also, because they’re staying isolated, it’s not good for their mental health, either.”*

Many older adults also are coping with grief over loss of a loved one during the pandemic.

“One thing that’s been really difficult is that they haven’t really had an opportunity to grieve, and maybe not accepting the help,” said a participant, who also noted that traditional funerals and bereavement support services have been curtailed or hard to access during the pandemic.

For some older adults, the pandemic and other issues have led to unresolved mental trauma.

“One issue that I see come up is trauma in older adults. Often they have been taught not to ‘air’ their dirty laundry, and when I visit them, I find that there are severe trauma histories, trauma that they are addressing sometimes for the first time.”

Many older adults have become less physically active, due to senior center closures and fear of going outside their homes. *“The downside of COVID was that all those programs [at senior centers] were kind of shut down, which forced everyone to be in their isolation ... I see a lot of the social isolation for the seniors. You wind up homebound, you lose your ability to go out, and then you are sitting, and then you lose your energy ... and we all know an object in motion stays in motion and people become de-energized, the less they move.”*

Lack of affordable transportation adds to social isolation for those who do not drive. *“A lot of them are remaining independent for a long time, and either their families take away their cars, or they decide ‘I’m not comfortable driving anymore,’ and I don’t think there’s a lot of good, affordable transportation in this area. So, I see that just getting to doctor’s appointments a lot of times [is a problem], and getting out and so forth.”*

The **shift to virtual services** during the pandemic also has challenged many older adults.

- *“Technology is a huge barrier for seniors. As a whole world moving into virtual world, we need to make sure that we don’t leave them behind. For low-income seniors, that technology can be an issue and access to technology, especially if during COVID they couldn’t get to libraries or senior centers.”*
- Learning to use technology and other health care navigation is especially hard for those who do not speak English as their first language. A participant whose organization serves Asian Americans shared: *“We even had phone calls from English speaking seniors who were*

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having hard time because they cannot sign up for COVID vaccine, I was on the phone with like 80 year old grandmas saying, 'I don't have a computer, I have to get my COVID vaccine, I don't know what to do like, there's nobody to help me.'"

On the plus side, the increase in telehealth visits can be a convenience for those with digital access and has **enabled some providers to meet the growing demand for their services.** *"We have had a decrease in no shows and cancellations of appointments, due to the use of telehealth. Small silver lining,"* said a participant whose organization provides health and social services.

Suggested Actions

Increase screening for behavioral health issues as part of routine medical exams. One participant, who recently joined a new family care practice, said she was delighted when her provider asked her screening questions on mental health such as: *"How I was feeling, [did] I have some strong relationships that I could lean in on, what are some things that you enjoy? Have you found that you're not enjoying things as much as you used to?"*

Strengthen collaboration between senior living facilities and hospital discharge staff, to better coordinate care when older adults are discharged from a hospital stay to return to their senior facility. A related suggestion: provide visiting exercise coaches (not necessarily a physical therapist) who visit older adults in their homes to encourage physical activity.

Increase collaboration and communication between hospitals and local community organizations providing health and social services. Since many people are not tech-savvy, other forms of outreach are needed to increase awareness of hospital programs and services. Hospitals also could provide training to local organizations whose staff are often the first to encounter and support community members experiencing behavioral health issues.

Also needed: better language translation/interpretation support for those who do not speak English as their first language.