

**2022 Regional Community Health Needs Assessment:
Geographic Community Conversation Summary: Southwest Philadelphia
[Philadelphia County]**

Community Assets

Participants value their **strong sense of community and support from local organizations**. One participant described how community members had recently come together for a clean-up day at a local playground. *“That was a blessing. And that keeps you healthy. ... It also keeps the people engaged and trying to keep up the community where they live.”* Another commented: *“The faith-based organizations that are here ... are an added plus, because certainly they're engaging in activities that bring health and hope to their members, as well as others that they're in contact with.”*

Plentiful open space and opportunities for outdoor recreation for youth and adults, such as walking, biking, and organized sports, were mentioned by several. *“I think part of what helps to keep our community healthy, we have a lot of open green space,”* commented one, noting the area's proximity to the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge. *“There's a lot of green space,”* said another, who also noted the importance of caring for open space. *“It's about maintaining the greens in terms of environmental hygiene and practices, that helps keep the environment a healthy place.”*

While appreciating these assets, several pointed out that the nearby airport and heavy vehicle traffic can detract from enjoying the outdoors, because of **noise and air pollution** as well as **pedestrian safety issues**. *“We have blessings and curses,”* one participant said. *“We are a community of contradiction. But I think that the open green space is a good attribute to our emotional health.”*

Key Challenges

Major community concerns include **cancer, asthma, and mental stress or trauma associated with recent flooding, the pandemic, and other factors**. Two participants commented on **high rates of cancer** they see in the community. *“We have a very, very high rate of cancer back here because of the landfills, [for] which EPA recently has done clean up,”* said one, who noted that Eastwick is the site of a former Super Fund site (the Clearview Landfill). Another agreed, noting she had developed cancer and seen many other cases among her fellow church members. **Asthma is another common ailment**, a participant said, which she associated with *“air quality where we live, with the airport and carbon from cars and all sorts of stuff.”*

Residents also discussed **mental stress and trauma associated with environmental hazards, including flooding and illegal dumping (discussed below)**. With some areas of Eastwick being flood-prone, those living near creeks that can overflow during storms may experience extreme stress. *“Every time it rains, these people go crazy. It's sad,”* one said.

Mental health issues are a chief concern, exacerbated by lack of proper care early in the course of illness for many, that can lead to homelessness, violence, or other adverse outcomes. *“We could help people, if we could get them access at an earlier point, but the standard is to wait until they self-harm or harm someone else,”* said one. **Stigma associated with mental illness** also keeps people from seeking care, another said: *“People think that there's a stigma when you*

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go for mental health treatment, and it doesn't necessarily mean that you're off your rocker, but we all need a healing, let's just say, and there's nothing wrong with seeking it."

Access to convenient medical care is a particular challenge in Eastwick. *"We have no medical facilities back here," said one participant. "You always have to go over the county line [to Delaware County] for medical treatment. We have a few dentists and maybe one or two doctors' offices. And that's it." She added that while there is an urgent care clinic nearby, it's mainly intended for those using or working at the airport. "So, if you're not an airport employee, you can just forget it. ... I have to go out to the county every time. I'm asthmatic, I need to get somewhere quick."*

Social Determinants of Health

Built environment issues. In addition to concerns about flooding and environmental contamination mentioned above, participants discussed the adverse impacts of illegal dumping. *"If one person dumps a bag anywhere, then that's the dumping target. And the city is doing nothing about it [because] come trash day, because it's not in front of a residential home ... the trash just keeps pilling in. ... And that is unsafe, unhealthy."*

A participant also commented on pedestrian safety as a built environment issue, such as lack of traffic-calming speed bumps or school crossing guards on some roads.

Housing costs. *"Cost of housing is really expensive in Southwest now. And if you had to put all your money, all your income on housing, then that would take away from you being able to buy fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy food. And that happens a lot. A three-bedroom home or a two-bedroom home might cost you \$1,400 to live in Southwest in a row home. So, that takes up majority of your monthly income. So, that's definitely, I believe, a factor in having a healthy lifestyle."*

Food security. *"The price for the food is just ridiculous. The quantity of the food is less, but you're paying so much more. You can't even go to the market and get what you would normally get, say for a \$100, it's costing you way more."*

Children and Youth

Participants commented on a range of issues affecting healthy youth development, including **pandemic-related social isolation, lack of stable home environments, and fear associated with gun violence.**

- Because of social isolation during the pandemic, a participant felt that children were at greater risk of suicide *"because they didn't know how to deal with not being able to go out and play and interact with other kids."*
- *"And now, look at the gun violence, these poor kids don't stand a chance, and a lot of them are afraid. They're afraid to go to school."*
- *"I find that there's a lot of young parents raising children that are still trying to raise themselves, so they want to be equal to their children."*

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Several participants expressed concern about the **lack of enriching extracurricular programs for youth**, which were in short supply even before the pandemic, due to cuts in local school budgets.

- *“Even before the pandemic, they began taking away programs that were really conducive to children, ... providing an outlet, the arts and various other types of programs which will contribute to helping to balance a kid and [provide] somewhere for them to just act out their energy, place their energy in a constructive manner.”*
- *“Aside [from] academics, the youths especially need to engage in extracurricular and social activities to stay healthy both physically and mentally. However, this is constrained by the restrictions caused by the COVID pandemic. This is a challenge.”*
- *“The pandemic has created perhaps a lack of access to healthy outlets for emotions/mental health” [for children].*

Older Adults

Many older adults face navigation challenges to access health care, worsened during the pandemic, several participants said. A major issue is difficulty understanding Medicare policies. *“Trying to navigate their way through this whole Medicare system. Really, that is a maze, that is a maze,”* said one. Lack of awareness about eligibility for Medicare (or Medicaid) is another issue. A participant who works for a social services organization said: *“When we do an assessment, and we find out that [they are eligible for health insurance], they're really happy, because they may have had, or are having, issues, and ... for some, they don't want to go to the doctor because of the expense.”*

Transportation barriers are an obstacle for some older adults. Participants said getting to a local grocery store usually requires a car or public transit, with challenges related to transporting packages and busy streets also limiting walkability. *“If you're elderly, and you have a lot of packages, unless you want to use Uber, now you're talking about expensive,”* said one.

Social isolation is an issue for many older adults who are reluctant to leave their homes for **fear of violence**. *“I would say most of them [are] fearful coming out. ... They really fear for their lives, getting robbed. ... And when you're confined in the house because you're afraid to come out, that's not good for you. Your limbs don't move like they used to, you're not getting the fresh air that you need to stay healthy.”*

Especially during the pandemic, older adults who lack computer equipment or skills have been challenged to access health care or use other services that require the internet, such as online food shopping and home delivery services. As one participant put it: Groceries and other essentials are accessible only *“as long as you have access to the internet and have those computer skills, which many seniors may not or [they] may be intimidated by that.”*

Several commented on the need for a **stronger support system for older adults**, such as from younger family members or others to check on them. *“For the older adult to stay healthy, I think they really needed strong support system from the younger adults. By support, I mean, financial,*

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physical support for those who may not be able to walk themselves, to see health care facilities.”

Other Impacts of the Pandemic

Several commented about **delays and difficulties in accessing health care** during the pandemic.

- *“The COVID pandemic has made it really difficult to access health care. I had some medical appointments cancelled/rescheduled during the pandemic. Think about patients who are being managed for chronic illnesses but can't get regular appointments with their healthcare provider due to the COVID pandemic.”*
- *“Because of the overload of the COVID cases, other people with other ailments got pushed to the backburner because there weren't enough supplies, doctors, beds, whatever, so, hopefully they're working their way through that. Now, it's just been a chaotic situation and that's putting it mildly.”*

The pandemic also has exacerbated community mental health issues, with several participants commenting on the **burden of grief for people who lost loved ones**.

- *“What has really affected a lot of people that I know of, they've lost loved ones, and we were in the throes of the pandemic, you couldn't even be there. So, there was no closure and people are running around with a sense of guilt and all that plays on your psyche.”*
- *“And some of them had been in the hospital in the morgue for weeks before they even released the body and the spouse or the children ... couldn't even go to the hospital to identify the body for a long time. [Many carry] grief and is blame, what did I do wrong? What could I have done different?”*

Suggested Actions

Several efforts are already working well or in progress to address key health priorities, participants said. For example:

Local faith-based institutions are working with the city to provide COVID education and vaccination. *“The city has come out, had its mobile testing unit on site at our faith-based organizations. We've had a number of vaccine clinics back here to help people as well as [provide] COVID education.”* The participant added that she also had received training [from a city program, Network of Neighbors] *“to help counsel people, and just form that warm, fuzzy community network, where people can come to us as a resource, until we can refer them out to more qualified individuals or organizations to address their concerns.”*

A closed school building will be renovated to become a health clinic and facility to provide job training and career development. Career development activities will focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Mathematics), as well as training for tourism and hospitality. Related efforts to create career pathways for local youth will focus on *“using our community as the classroom where [youth] can be exposed to such things as environmental sciences using Heinz National Wildlife Refuge as the classroom.”*

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Other local institutions, such as Simeone's Automotive Museum, can help youth *“learn not only things like auto mechanics, [but also] the scientific principles like aerodynamics and other scientific principles. ... Sometimes, if you expose a child to something that they wouldn't ordinarily be exposed to, it could change their trajectory of what they do, and choices that they make moving forward. So, that's what we would like to see happen in our community. And we are aggressively working toward that.”*

Participants also suggested these additional actions to improve community health:

Provide more support for older adults to access and navigate health care and other basic services. *“This is a new day, weird paradigm we're living in and things have changed significantly. And they [older adults] just need help learning how to navigate those systems,”* a participant commented.

Train community members to help provide resources and support for people with mental health challenges. One participant suggested working with community members to *“help train each other to be responsive to people who may have mental health issues and to be able to refer them to other sources that can deal with [their] specific issues.”*

Increase city support and expand neighborhood initiatives to clean up litter and trash in the community. *“I'm starting to see neighbors come out and clean their own fronts and sweep up, have some pride in the neighborhood that they live in, that we all live in. Because the statistics tell us that you feel good about where you live, crime goes down, people feel better about themselves, better about the community. ... It's something that we do, we can organize our own blocks. The city will give you bags and brooms, and things of that nature. But we have to start it ourselves.”*