## Community Assets

Participants value **local nonprofits and other organizations serving the community, including food pantries, afterschool programs for youth, and job training services to help returning citizens readjust to society.**

- *"A lot of our food pantries, they are giving out the right food. They're particularly focused on giving out healthy products, not just a lot of junk food, but healthy products. ... They have helped these people [older adults and others in need] a great deal by giving them the good healthy product, fresh fruits and vegetables to help promote healthy living, and I think that makes a big difference,"* said a participant who works with a social services agency.
- Organizations such as Catholic Social Services in Chester *"promote healthy lifestyles and healthy eating ... it makes it very easy for a lot of people in our community [who] cannot afford to buy a lot of things."*
- Two urgent care centers, in Brookhaven and Aston are *"a positive for Delaware County and Chester area, specifically. That has been a great help."*

**Several online information resources that help connect people to local resources and services** were mentioned. *"Another great resource in Delaware County, which encompasses Chester, is the Delaware County Chamber of Commerce website. There's another website and social media page, and it's called DARN—Delco Area Resource Network, and that's for Delaware County,"* said one participant, although another pointed out that many community members cannot easily access online information.

**The new Delaware County Department of Health,** expected to become operational in early 2022, was highlighted as a much-needed asset. *"It would be very helpful and beneficial for Delaware County to have their ... own Health Department set up, and I think it'd be a better flow of information through the county,"* said one participant.

## Key Challenges

**Behavioral health issues were a top concern for all participants.** *"Mental health is a big issue as well as substance abuse, and that includes drug use and alcohol,"* said one participant. Another agreed: *"Yes, mental health is a big thing, substance abuse is a big thing."*

Several participants commented on high rates of **cancer, thyroid disorders, and respiratory conditions, such as asthma and emphysema**, which they associated with air pollution from nearby industrial plants. *"We also have, because of the high pollution from the plants, thyroid issues and asthma, [and] not being able to go out,"* shared one participant. The same participant mentioned that **diabetes and heart disease** also are common.

Participants cited a variety of **barriers to accessing health care.** Common challenges include the cost of prescription drugs, lack of provider capacity in the area and, especially for behavioral health care, lack of adequate health insurance coverage. For mental health care, stigma is another barrier that keeps many from seeking care.

*Please see the section entitled "Our Collaborative Approach" in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Community Health Needs Assessment report for details on data collection and analysis methods.*

1

*"The cost of prescriptions are just ridiculous for some items [and] seem like they go up every year,"* shared one participant, who also was concerned about Chester becoming a "pharmacy desert," given recent news that CVS is closing a number of stores in the region and many residents lack transportation to travel to more distant pharmacies.

The same participant commented on **long waits and other difficulties scheduling appointments with local health providers.** *"I have a hard time accessing different providers for my children, because either the provider doesn't take the healthcare [insurance] that I have for my children, or the provider is so booked up they're not taking new clients. So, I'm forced to go back into Philadelphia, and not my local provider."* She added that, in seeking care for mental health, *"I had to wait five months because of my insurance to see a local counselor here in Delaware County."*

Several participants cited the **need to expand health insurance coverage for behavioral health conditions.** They noted, for example, that people with severe mental illness often were discharged from inpatient care settings before they were sufficiently well enough to return to the community. As one participant put it: *"My mental health situation is up to my insurance carrier. I can be cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs all day long, and if that insurance guy says we will [only cover care] for 21 days, day 22 I'm back out on the street."*

Another participant commented on **the need to address stigma associated with mental health issues.** *"The mental health in our community is a big, big thing. And we got to overcome the stigma ... We need people that can talk to our people [to help them] overcome the stigma of mental health."* For example, she suggested, *"a lot of times, just opening up that dialogue or starting a support group within the community at a church, at a place where people feel safe where they can express them self, that would be one of the things to help with too."*

Regarding the pandemic, one participant stressed the **need for continued outreach and community-based services to boost COVID vaccination rates.** *"I think efforts should be continued to be sure that everyone, if possible, can be vaccinated to try to prevent this thing, because it definitely hasn't gone [away],"* shared the participant. *"I know you can't make people take the vaccine, but somehow, they just have to realize that they're not only hurting themselves but they're hurting the people that are around them, you know?"*

One participant also noted the **need for more health information and other resources to be adapted for people who have impaired vision or need other accommodations.** *"I can see, but I am visually impaired, and I can't always use the computer—that's part of the reason why I need papers [print materials to read] sometimes."*

## Social Determinants of Health

**Built environment issues, including trash and green space:**
- *"I think to make this community a healthy place to live, they need to clean up more around here, as far as like the trash. People put their trash all out, you know, on the days that are not even supposed to [have trash] picked up. And it's just a mess. ... In the summer, you can*

*hardly sit out there because ... you probably got rodents and everything else running around."*

- Another commented that Chester has too few sanitation workers and *"now we have an issue with illegal dumping. ... So, you can't walk around, because it's a health hazard, it's an environmental hazard. And when you try to call the city about it for bulk trash pickup, you can barely get bulk trash pickup, because the way that they schedule it."*
- One participant also commented on inability to use a local park, because of saturated wet ground from nearby Ridley Creek. *"I live near the park, and I can't go play ball or walk my dog in the park in the grass, because the park is so saturated, because of the [high] water table."*

**Lack of access to information about community resources and assistance, especially for those who do not use the internet:**

- *"Finding out about the local things that's going on in Chester is literally impossible. I see a lot of people in Chester that want hope, that want change, they want to eat healthy, they want to do things they just can't access information. So, how do we change that narrative?"*
- A participant whose organization provides financial counseling to help people with budgeting, credit, and home ownership added: *"People are trying to do everything on their cell phone, they do not have access to a computer or a printer that can assist with scanning or faxing, and things like that. And some of the documents we get are just not legible."* She noted the difficulty of determining eligibility and completing applications for assistance programs for people who lack digital access, especially during the pandemic, when in-person visits to complete paperwork have been curtailed. *"It's real hard trying to get the various documentation that we need to qualify people for different types of programs that we offer assistance, funds, and things like that. If we don't have the proper documentation, we can't ... determine eligibility for anything."*

**The digital divide also is an issue for many returning citizens.** *"If I've been incarcerated for the last 15 years, and I'm 30 years old, and I get out and I'm 45 years old, technology has changed. I don't know how to do this stuff. I've literally had clients come in [who] don't even know how to work a cell phone,"* said a participant whose organization provides services for returning citizens. *"So, there has to be some places available with some resources. One of the great resources in our area is CareerLink. They can go in there and get assistance with going on the computer, filling out paperwork, getting information for employment and or social services, and they will assist you with filling out those documents."*

## Children and Youth

Participants discussed a number of concerns affecting the health and well-being of young people, including **lack of a healthy diet, physical inactivity associated with too much screen time, gang violence and childhood neglect, especially in homes where parents are impaired by substance use.** The need for more afterschool activities and programs to help youth develop healthy lifestyles, such as sports, cooking classes, and basic financial literacy, was cited. Families also may need access to safe transportation options for children to get to and from afterschool programs, especially if parents or caregivers are working when programs are offered.

**Neglect of children.** One Chester participant recalled, before the pandemic, *"watching children walk around in the wintertime with no coats on, no socks, no proper uniform, no food."* She added, at another point in the conversation: *"What I'm noticing more in the community, with the substance abuse, is the neglect of children."*

Several participants expressed concern about **unhealthy eating and lack of physical activity among youth, leading to childhood overweight and obesity.** Air pollution from nearby industrial plants also can prevent children from playing outside, one participant said.

- *"When we were coming up, we were outside playing all types of games and whatnot. And these kids [today] don't have that advantage now, because they got cell phones, Xbox, and whatever else is out there. And I think they're not getting out to get any type of exercise, not unless they were involved in some kind of school sport or whatever. ... They come home from school, and they on the phone, they on their Xbox and all that stuff, and eating junk or whatever, and that's not healthy. And that's why you see a lot of kids that are so much overweight. ... Kids today don't know how to play outside."*
- *"Parents are working two or three jobs, so the kids rely on McDonald's and fast food [or] pizza down on the corner. They get what works for them in between school and basketball, some of these kids don't finish their day until six and seven o'clock after school, after band, after football, then they go home. So, they grab something quick to do what they need to do before they have to turn in for the night."*
- When safe recreational activities are limited, youth are more vulnerable to being *"indoctrinated into a gang."*

Another priority issue **for children's health is lead poisoning in older homes from peeling or chipped paint.** One participant commented: *"If I had my way and all the money in the world, I'd make sure ... every house in Delaware County is lead-free, free of lead-based paint."*

On a positive note, participants highlighted **several community programs that are working well to serve youth.** For example, one mentioned a youth program open two nights a week at a local high school *"just for youth to come in and hang out, and hear, and learn, and get some tutorial help if need be, and just come in and decompress."*

## Older Adults

**For many older adults living on fixed or limited incomes, health challenges include difficulty affording health care and other essential services, lack of transportation options for those who do not drive, and barriers to accessing information and resources for those without computer access or skills.** *"A lot of people that are in our community ... cannot afford to buy a lot of things, especially when you get into the senior population [and] those that are on social security or disability. Their funding is limited, their food stamps are limited, things of that nature,"* said one participant. He also noted the important work of local food pantries and other food donation programs that provide nutritious food to many elderly residents.

**Social support from family members or others also is needed,** another added: *"So, as our*

*seniors get senior, sometimes it takes us helping them go get what's necessary. Picking up the food box at the pantry to make sure that they have what's necessary to eat, so that they're just not eating something that's quick, because they don't have the energy or the ability to cook."*

Several participants mentioned the need for **more affordable and convenient transportation options for older adults and others who do not drive**. One participant commented that, for her elderly mother to get to doctor's appointments, *"she would have to get at least three buses."* Another mentioned that some health insurers will cover transportation costs to medical appointments but *"the only problem is you have to either schedule it ahead of time, or you have to see if your insurance, you have that benefit, and how often [it can be used]."*

Several also commented that the **digital divide especially affects many older adults.** *"What about the senior citizens who can't afford a computer, or ... printers and stuff like that?"* asked one participant. Another commented that older adults living in retirement facilities or visiting senior centers usually have access to a computer center, but these services have been limited during the pandemic.

## Other Groups

The group discussed some of the **needs of people returning to the community after incarceration.** In particular, one participant stated: *"A lot of grown people in Delaware County, and specifically in Chester, do not even have valid identification cards,"* such as a current driver's license or other form of ID. *"It's very difficult for someone to go get a shot for a [COVID] vaccine if they don't have a valid ID, and/or social security card."*

People re-entering the community after incarceration often have no money or family support to pay for processing a valid ID, such as if their previous ID was lost, expired or never issued, the same participant noted. *"They have no family, they have no financial support. So, that's one of the barriers that I see on a regular basis in Delaware County and specifically in Chester."*

## Suggested Actions

Among their top priorities, all participants wanted to see **more efforts to address mental health needs and substance use issues in the community.** Specific actions, suggested by one or more participants, were to:

**Create a mobile clinic to bring health care services directly into the community.** *"Having a mobile unit in Chester to go to the different parts that will help, that would take away a lot of the barrier,"* said one participant, who envisioned a "one-stop shop" for health services, geared to community needs. *"When I lived in Philadelphia, we would have mobile units come out from the health department. ... If we had a mobile testing unit, a COVID testing unit, a mobile vaccination unit, [and] somebody in there that would talk to the people."* She suggested a mobile clinic where people would not need to have *"an ID in order to get vaccinated, because in some cases, in different places, you have a lot of immigrants [who]don't have identification."*

**Provide medical advocates to help people navigate the health care system and access medical assistance programs,** such as programs to defray the cost of prescription drugs. As one participant summed it: *"So, having access to a knowledgeable medical advocate who [can] advocate and coordinate prescription help in cost, so that they can have that resource to access."*

**Increase outreach to raise awareness of community resources and services, especially for those who lack digital access.** Getting the word out directly in community settings, such as where people live, work, shop, play, or visit community institutions, is important, one participant said. *"In Philadelphia, where I go to get my hair done, is a community fridge right in front of the hair place. So, I actually get a lot of news through that community fridge. And I actually talk to people through that fridge versus, you know, in Chester, I'm sort of isolated."*

Another participant suggested sending trained outreach workers into the community to talk with people about their needs, especially *"where people are that won't go to a center or won't go in for help."* Outreach workers could *"just hear from them what's going on and what services they need."* Another agreed, adding *"if we had multiple teams and volunteers that would go into the community to do it, we could solve a lot of these problems, and work together as a community to get that done."*

**Increase communications and resource sharing among local nonprofits and other agencies serving the community.** *"I have seen organizations doing a better job of sharing information,"* said a participant who works for a social services organization. *"Like my organization, we get information from other social service agencies that we can distribute to our database of clients, so we tried to do that on a regular basis. So, sharing of resources would be good."*

**Expand efforts to close the digital divide.** One participant noted that Delaware County is conducting a survey to assess residents' access to broadband internet. In addition to affordable internet service, some residents need access to computer equipment and skills training, several participants said.

**Develop new programs (or raise awareness of existing efforts) to educate youth on healthy eating and other valuable life skills, such as cooking, food shopping, and budgeting.** In this regard, participants mentioned several programs that already are working well to support families with developing healthy lifestyles and improving their welfare. For example, one participant mentioned his organization offers a program to *"show our clients how to cook healthy nutritious meals, [with] handed out samples for them right there."* Another program provides a community dinner for families, followed by homework help for youth while parents attend customer service training as part of a job training initiative.

**Increase assistance for citizens in reentry, especially those in need of valid IDs.** Compared with Philadelphia, which has a number of programs to help people with the application and fees to obtain an ID, similar programs in Chester are limited, with more support needed.