

**2022 Regional Community Health Needs Assessment:  
Geographic Community Conversation Summary: South Philadelphia-East  
[Philadelphia County]**

## **Community Assets**

Participants especially value their community's **walkability** and **access to public transportation**. *"We have a lot of public transportation options, meaning there's fewer cars on the road, which means fewer chances to get hit by one and less pollution,"* said one. Another said: *"For me, having sidewalks to be able to walk ... is really, really important because I've lived in places where there's no sidewalks and it's sometimes dangerous. I walk more, so that's a good thing that keeps my neighborhood healthy."* A participant who is a recent immigrant added: *"I can walk to the health center. I can walk to the [hospital]. So, that keeps me healthy and my baby, too."*

Other local assets are **access to healthy food, community gardens, and local organizations** that serve people in need. *"SEAMAAC makes our neighborhood healthier!"* exclaimed one participant, who uses this nonprofit organization's services that support local immigrant and refugee communities. Another mentioned an increase in local wellness programs, such as **meditation and yoga**, during the pandemic.

## **Key Challenges**

Participants cited **behavioral health issues, including substance use**, as top health concerns:

- *"Mental health seems to me to be a big crisis, as well as the lack of services in other languages and the difficulty in getting therapists that are available even with insurance, especially Medicaid."*
- *"I really agree with what [was] said about drug use; it's a very big problem, as is prostitution."*

Participants, who included several representatives of local immigrant communities, also highlighted **language barriers** faced by immigrants and refugees when accessing care:

- *"Many doctors don't use [the] language line. Some interpreters are not very good at English,"* one said. *"There's interpreters, but there's also that fear of them just not fully understanding, especially cultural-wise."*
- Another participant, who speaks English well but whose mother does not, added: *"A few times I went to the doctors with my mom. We usually call the translator even though I'm there, just to make sure everything is correct. It will turn out I'm better at translating than the translator. ... They didn't exactly translate what my mom was saying. .... When she asks to define the word of what they're trying to say, they can't even do that for her. She usually can't understand what the translator is trying to say to her, as well."*
- Feeling stigmatized by healthcare providers is another concern. *"There's actually a big stigma with [health care providers who] believe that Hispanics are overdramatic when it comes to their pain."* The participant added that her father, who is from Latin America: *"He's scared to actually talk fully about his health concerns."*

**Religious and cultural beliefs can be further barriers to care.** In some cultures, women want to be seen by a female doctor and may be reluctant or ashamed to see a male provider. Religious

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dietary restrictions can impede medication use; for example, those who practice the Muslim faith need to check that their medications do not contain pork-derived substances.

## **Social Determinants of Health**

Two participants mentioned **lack of nutrition education** to help people make healthy choices, which one linked to a high incidence of kidney disease among those she knew. Another said: *“We don't even know how to check the nutrition facts in ... foods. A lot of people don't know how to eat healthy food, [make] healthy meals to take care of health. Lack of education on nutrition and other ways to be healthy seems to be lacking.”*

Another issue, cited by several: **litter and lack of neighborhood cleanliness**. One said: *“Walking [home] tonight, I literally saw somebody bend down on the sidewalk, take out a container and shove it into the sewer. It's the little things that build upon larger systemic issues. You're in a spiral of just like, ‘Well, everyone else is sick around this neighborhood. Everyone else is living in filth. Why would you care?’”* Another mentioned the **lack of nearby parks**. *“In my neighborhood, there's no green space that you can access. ... You have to walk a few more blocks away [from] your neighborhood to find a green space. It's quite a challenge.”*

**Increased access to information and resources also is needed.** *“I feel most of the time that I hear about outreach in South Philadelphia, I see it on Facebook, and that's not enough.”*

## **Children and Youth**

**Lack of safe recreational spaces** also is a barrier to children's health. *“I've seen a lot of kids grow up on my block. And of course, where they play is in the street because ... there's not a lot of other places to go, where there's green space or parks. ... But the streets are filled with broken glass and trash and cars go too fast,”* said one. Another similarly mentioned seeing children playing on broken glass. *“This is a very common thing. I see glass all over the ground and kids are walking on it and dogs are walking on it and stuff.”*

## **Older Adults**

Participants discussed challenges with finding **affordable home health care services** to help older adults, due to both financial and cultural constraints:

- *“Our home care system is a big problem. I went through this with my mom for many years. it's hard to get home care, it's expensive, [and] home care aides are hard to find.”*
- *“Some seniors do not want non-family members coming into their homes. Sometimes they have a hard time trusting people in their home. I just know that whenever I have clients who desperately need care, I'll try. They'll say, ‘No, no. You're not family. We don't want these strangers in our home.’ ”*
- A participant who works at an organization that provide services for immigrants and refugees said: *“We try to pair [immigrant older adults] with caregivers who speak their language or from their culture, but sometimes even that doesn't work. Many of my elderly clients don't want caregivers in their home unless they are family.”*

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**Older adults who are immigrants with limited incomes are especially vulnerable.** *“I know a lot of immigrant elders are working until their late 70s, and they're working in factory situations and in pain a lot. They feel they have to [work] because they don't feel like they can survive on their Social Security checks ... [and] some don't have that. There's quite a few elderlies [sic] who are actually undocumented and are forced to work.”*

## **Other Groups**

Participants commented briefly on special issues for immigrants, as well as for the LGBTQ+ community.

- Immigrants may experience worry and stress about their legal status. *“There's a lack of security when you're an immigrant, as well. You're always questioning your status. ‘Yeah, my family are immigrants,’ so they question their status sometimes, just like, ‘Do I deserve to be here? Let me prove myself.’ Unfortunately, that's not actually the case legally, but mentally that can be the case.”*
- One participant also mentioned the need for more resources to support the LGBTQ+ community. *“Something to also take into consideration is support for the LGBTQ+ community in South Philly. In my experience there are less resources here than in other areas.”*

## **Other Impacts of the Pandemic**

Participants said that **language and cultural barriers** for immigrant communities have been worsened by the pandemic. When COVID-19 vaccine clinics were first announced, local organizations serving immigrants struggled to find educational materials and conduct outreach in languages that their members and clients could understand. For many people with limited English proficiency, as well as older adults, using the internet to access online resources about the pandemic or use virtual services such as Zoom also was difficult.

Another issue: **increased discrimination and violence against Asian Americans.** *“I think the safety is a biggest concern for my community,”* said one participant who is Asian American. *“Many people are concerned as Asian; many people are concerned as Chinese. There's increase of anti-Asian violence. ... It's still going on. Everywhere, small things happen. Now, students are going back to school. I hear a few cases around the school. Like now students getting bullied ... if they're Asian or if they are Chinese.”*

Also briefly mentioned: home COVID tests are hard to find. One participant said: *“I tried to get COVID tests twice in South Philly and couldn't get them. I've never seen over-the-counter COVID tests at any store in South Philly.”*

## **Suggested Actions**

**Increase health literacy and reduce language barriers, especially in immigrant and refugee communities.** SEAMAAC, for example, offers a Health English class, which teaches

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immigrants basic health vocabulary and how to talk with providers about health symptoms and issues. A participant familiar with the program said: *“The feedback that we have received from our clients is that, even if they provide translators in the hospital, they ... want to show and describe to the doctor their pain by themselves, instead of using the translator. They say that the translator ... doesn't understand our pain or what we are feeling.”*

**Provide more programs to help people find jobs that pay a living wage.** For example: while not yet a formal program, SEAMAAC works with an English-speaking community liaison who helps connect immigrants with jobs at area businesses. With more funding, this effort could expand into a structured program, the participant said, helping to connect immigrants with *“employers who are willing to take people whose English isn't quite so good yet or to find ways to employ them. I think that's really important, and that's a solution.”*

**Improve neighborhood cleanliness and the safety of streets and play spaces.** *“More could be done to think of our streets as play places and keep them safe, traffic calming, more cleanups. I know there's play streets programs in other parts of the city. ... More opportunities for kids to be able to play outside the front [of their] house without worrying about getting injured, could be really important.”*

**Build trust and understanding among people from different cultures,** especially youth. For example, multicultural programs could bring together immigrant youth with other young people, such as in programs to grow food together in community gardens. *“Young people need a lot of support. They are thinkers, they are leaders. ... We just need enough support for them [and with] a program to ... guide them, we'll be able to build a better community here.”* The same participant added: *“A lot of times in mainstream society, they tell us what's the different between us. They never teach us what is similar ... and why we need to be humble and learn from each other. We need a program to identify each other's identity, how beautiful each other's culture [is].”*

**Provide incentives for students to volunteer to help older adults or others in need.** A young adult participant commented: *“I can't tell you the number of students that I work with [who] want to help older adults, but they [students] don't have the funds. They don't have the time. ... Anything that could help them a little bit, so they can do what they want to do, which is actually benefit [a] person's life.”*

**Strengthen support for local organizations serving the community.** *“I think we need to think about strengthening not only SEAMAAC, but also other community groups, so they have more allies and partners in that work.”* Participants also suggested engaging community organizations and other trusted messengers to increase outreach about local resources and services. *“Those leaders can reach out to the community because they are close to the community.”* The importance of faith-based organizations in providing outreach and support services was also mentioned.