

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

Community Assets

Local community organizations, often staffed by volunteers, provide a range of services.

“Information on resources is pretty easily available, whether it was the various vaccines or just other issues [such as] food distribution sites,” one participant said, adding *“and it can be anything from, you know, the food and disaster kind of stuff, but also, just general health.”*

Another praised **increased food donations** during the pandemic: *“I think the food giveaways were excellent for the community—that was something that could help everybody.”*

Key Challenges

Cancer and other chronic conditions, such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and stress-related ailments, are common in the community, several noted. But participants especially emphasized the heavy burden of **behavioral and mental health issues**, exacerbated by drug use, violence, and pandemic-related social isolation.

- *“I think the mental health component is really a big thing. We have added to our church a mental health component where we have mental health professionals on call, you know, for our congregation, and for people that may call in. People have gotten so stagnated since the pandemic, it's like they're so isolated.”*
- *“At least for me in my neighborhood, there's an added layer of, like, just high crime and high drug use. So, you're adding the pandemic that isolated everybody, we have our seniors who are even more isolated because of that, and then we have a bunch of individuals who are running around the neighborhood kind of like inducing fear.”*
- *“In my neighborhood, the access and availability of illegal drugs is so, so large and so vast, and they're easily accessible, so that's a challenge right there.”*

Participants noted the **lack of accessible behavioral health services**, especially in the community but also in surrounding areas. *“Usually, you have to go outside your neighborhood to get help. There's nothing in your neighborhood to say, ‘well, to get the [treatment], I can go next door to a counselor or something,’ there's nothing like that in my neighborhood. You have to get accessibility outside the neighborhood, and then it's very limited.”*

During the pandemic, many people have delayed routine screenings and other healthcare visits, several participants said. *“During the pandemic, people put their routine mammograms, or the men for their prostate checks ... on hold, because they [were like] ‘I'm not going to go out,’”* said one participant, noting an *“uptick of cancer in the community.”* As a result of delayed screenings, *“people are coming in and their cancer has been active for 18 or 19 months, and now ... things are worse than it would have been if they [had] gone a year and a half ago.”*

Participants also discussed **insufficient time during medical appointments** to discuss their health issues and care plans.

- *“Doctors are limited to a certain timeframe, [and] if it's over a half hour, then they're running into somebody else's time. So, you have to write down or know what you need from*

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the doctor and give it to them and ask them to explain it in that time period, because he only has, the doctor only has a certain time period with you.”

- *“Obviously getting there is a big issue, but also just getting there itself and waiting in the waiting room, I feel like a lot of people are like, ‘Okay. I’m going to make all of this effort to get to somewhere.’ And ... a lot of patients are sitting in the waiting room, it’s taking a while, you don’t ... sometimes have that kind of courtesy where the staff acknowledge it, and say, ‘Hey, I know you’ve been waiting a while, we’re kind of backed up or whatever.’ So then they [the patient] had this mentality of like, ‘Okay. I don’t feel good, I’m going to like go over all of these obstacles to get there.’ And then they find themselves getting discouraged when they’re sitting there, or maybe even if they walk out of the doctor’s not feeling like any better, or that they got the answers that they needed.”*

Social Determinants of Health

Lack of transportation for those without cars, especially older adults and those with mobility issues, was cited as a priority issue. *“People that are on walkers or wheelchairs, there’s a fear factor of the community. So, they do need transportation, so they don’t have to try to walk to get where ... they’re going, because we know the crime level, they prey upon the seniors,”* one stated.

The impact of the **digital divide** on health was discussed. *“Certain populations, especially like low income individuals that I work with at my nonprofit, they can’t afford to have internet, they can’t afford to buy a computer or an iPad, to be able to do those things. You’d be surprised by the lack of knowledge that some people do have when it comes to technology. It’s opened my eyes that not everyone has equal access to the resources, and the assumption that they do is, is just wrong,”* said one participant.

Participants also raised the issue of **language and cultural barriers**, which can hinder access to health care and other services for many immigrants and refugees. *“Language is an extreme barrier ... I cannot count, I cannot tell you how many times I’ve heard stories of people who speak Spanish or any other language, just facing so many difficulties that are unnecessary that could just be easily improved if there was an advocate,”* one commented. Another noted the need to address *“not only language, but custom and culture and all that together.”*

Children and Youth

Participants discussed the need for **more programs to help youth develop skills for a healthy lifestyle and a path to employment**. *“It’s a challenge for the neighborhood, because when there’s too much time on their hands, they’re likely to get in trouble,”* one participant observed. With fewer youth programs open during the pandemic, the community saw an uptick in juvenile misbehavior and law-breaking, another noted: *“We’re seeing problems that we didn’t see before. And so younger kids breaking into houses and stuff like that. It’s not like it didn’t happen, but it’s much more of a plague now than it was before. And I think it’s probably, because there may not be things for them to do, to occupy them.”*

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Youth also **need better access to health information**, including sexual health education, one participant noted. *“They don't need to be 15 and pregnant. ... That's a healthcare issue that needs to be addressed in our community.”* Another suggested: *“Medical students or interns from the various hospitals come into the communities and advocate, and talk to the youth and the seniors, and sort of guide them, and advocate [for] them, and navigate them into the right resources, or to the right places they can go to get help.”*

One participant noted difficulties working with the school district during the pandemic to get transportation to specialized schools and other services for children with special needs.

Older Adults

Chief concerns mentioned for older adults include social isolation, lack of transportation to services, and financial strains to pay for food, medicine, and other essential services.

- *“I really think the pandemic has isolated a lot of the seniors. The seniors are the largest population that have been vaccinated, I am aware of that, but I think a lot of them are still fearful to come out.”*
- *“A lot of seniors are alone and don't have that family support. So, there's a big gap or a big hole in getting the right support to assist seniors to their doctor's appointments and medical appointments or even knowing about the different health plans and everything.”*
- *“I sort of live in what we call a food desert, so, and there's a lot of seniors who are on walkers and wheelchairs and canes, and right now, it's hard for them to get from point A to point B, because of the distance of the food markets.”*
- *“I find that if you're in a wheelchair, a lot of times people in public transportation will not accept you on the vehicle. In other words, they're standing in front will not let you on, the driver can't get them to move, so there's problems in that area.”*
- *“The public transportation that is available with SEPTA, they're [paratransit] so unreliable, they will leave a patient, and you know, not come back and get them for two or three hours. And I've seen, you know, while working in the hospital when it's a diabetic, they've got to go back home and eat. And so they've got to wait three or four hours, they didn't bring a snack. So, it's a major, you know, it's a conglomerate of things that, because they don't have that kind of accessibility.”*

Other Impacts of the Pandemic

For older adults, especially, **the growing shift to telehealth services** has been a challenge. *“A lot of seniors are not up to date with the technology, digital technology,”* said one participant. *“A lot of us need some kind of computer training or digital training on how to push buttons and what to use and what not to use.”*

Low rates of COVID vaccination in the community are a source of concern and frustration. One participant said: *“I'm concerned about the ones that don't have the shots yet. I mean, this pandemic should have been long gone and over with, if people would just do their research, and read and understand that the vaccination is important. Some people are still not vaccinated, and*

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that's horrible. When is it going to stop?" Another mentioned distrust of health care as a factor for low vaccination rates, especially in the Black community.

Suggested Actions

Train and use advocates to help people navigate health services and understand their care plans. As one participant explained: *"I was recently in the hospital, and my wife was there as my advocate. And I was in the hospital thinking then and there that I couldn't have ... done it without her, because, you know, she had a notepad, and she was on basically taking notes of, you know, the various medications."* Another added: *"We need people in the communities to assist the youth and the elderly, help them with their appointments, make sure that they get to their appointments, but there is a lacking."* Another suggested training medical students or interns to help youth and older adults access needed health information and resources.

Expand education and support to increase digital literacy for older adults and others, such as *"opening more like digital libraries so that people can go in and access them or having free workshops for digital literacy."*

Increase bilingual, culturally competent healthcare providers. *"I would say definitely having more bilingual staff, because it takes so much time for, like an example would be someone like a Spanish-speaking patient sitting in a room, I've seen so many times where like they're waiting a half hour or more just to get an interpreter on the line."* Another remarked: *"I think we have to meet the challenge of not only the difference in culture and ethnicity, but also the difference in religion, when we're going to deal with our Muslim community, or the Buddhist community that are coming into the facility with different kinds of beliefs. And we have to honor their belief and present it in a way that will be acceptable."*

Provide more robust communication about community resources, including job fairs to promote employment opportunities. *"So, just getting the word out there more, maybe having like, free workshops for the community so that people can have access and say, 'Hey like, this is available to you, all you have to do is this, this and this kind of thing.'"*

Increase accessible transportation to health care. *"I wish all medical facilities would provide some kind of transportation for some of the seniors,"* one person said, adding: *"You know, it doesn't have to be everyone, but there are some that really do need it, and they are alone."*

Provide ongoing education and advocacy to boost low vaccination rates. In addition, *"we need to also have access to the testing if you've been exposed,"* one participant noted. *"So, that's another issue that I would like to see addressed, I really would."*