



Putting People First: Working with Hospitals to Improve Community Health

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Getting involved in Hospital Community Benefit Planning: What Do Grassroots Groups Need to Know?

There is a great deal of visibility of late regarding the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and non-profit hospital Community Benefit programs. “Community Benefit” loosely refers to the services, programs and resources hospitals devote to improving the health of the community as a whole. It can include providing access to care for low-income patients, preventive care, and even social and economic issues that impact health.

Community Catalyst has long promoted a community benefit theory and process that includes a vital, engaged, and empowered role for community members as hospitals research, plan, implement and evaluate their programs. However, there are many challenges to meaningful engagement in hospital community benefit planning. These include:

- lack of trust, consistent relationships, or buy-in among hospital staff/board or community members
- lack of support for building and maintaining robust community engagement
- conflicting priorities and expectations
- shortage of time, energy, or will to get involved
- lack of know-how or skill set among community on how to get and stay engaged with hospital planning

Beginning in 2012, non-profit hospitals began revisiting their community benefit planning in order to comply with new federal requirements under Section 9007 of the ACA, including Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs) and Implementation Plans (IPs). While many will undoubtedly approach their assessment and planning with an eye for complying with the federal regulations, we believe this could be a ripe opportunity to promote “best practices” for community engagement.

With funding from the Kresge Foundation and the Surdna Foundation, Community Catalyst created these materials and curriculum components. They are intended for community-based and advocacy organizations that focus on those communities with higher levels of low-income people, communities of color, and immigrants to engage them in the community benefit planning process.

Goals of Putting People First: Working with Hospitals to Improve Community Health

Community Catalyst created these curriculum pieces, tools and resources to assist groups who want to get more involved in the hospital community benefit planning process. While these tools do not encompass all of the background nor provide all the support to ensure action can be taken by community groups, they do provide for a broad understanding of what hospitals are required to do, as well as how community groups can effectively advocate for their unmet community needs, including those related to the social determinants of health.

The overall goals of this training include:

- Educating community participants on key steps and intervention points for shaping, influencing, and participating in a local non-profit hospital's community benefit process (specifically, activities related to a community health needs assessment and implementation plan).
- Preparing community participants for conducting community health asset mapping.
- Enhancing community participants' ability and skill to build relationships and develop strategies to inform the hospital's community health needs assessment and implementation plan to address the needs they identify.
- Using a broad definition of "data" so community participants can identify and understand the data hospitals and public health leaders are using, and know how to bring community knowledge and data that informs the discussion.

We hope these training and resource materials will enable a group ask the right question and understand the support needed to start a campaign and begin relationship-building with their local non-profit hospital. We do not intend for these materials to provide you with everything you need to know to be successful. Community Catalyst and many of our national and state partners have additional materials and information to support you as you move forward in this important work.