

Leading by Community: Key Findings

New Hampshire State Health Assessment and Improvement Plan

The State Health Assessment was made more robust by adapting engagement strategies to collect the experiences of 335 survey respondents, 28 listening session participants, and 13 agencies representing the following identities:

- Black, indigenous, and persons of color
- New Americans (identifying as refugee or immigrant)
- Deaf and hard of hearing
- Families impacted by incarceration
- Incarcerated people
- LGBTQIA+
- Experiencing housing insecurity

Gratitude



Thank you to the many community members who participated in this work, the partners who connected us with these communities, and the community facilitators who created a comfortable space for neighbors to share their experiences. Additional gratitude is extended to the NH Academy of Family Physicians and Dartmouth Health for their provision of incentives for the community members and agencies who contributed to this important work.

BACKGROUND



In the spring of 2022, the NH State Health Assessment and State Health Improvement Plan Advisory Council (the Council) engaged in extensive outreach to a number of communities in the Granite State. The Council aimed to elevate the experiences of historical underrepresented and under-resourced communities so that the 2022 State Health Assessment reflected a more accurate depiction of health and wellness across NH.



This work was guided by members of the Council's Subcommittee on Community Engagement, and facilitated by the Community Health Institute/JSI in collaboration with Palabras Consulting, and several community members who acted as facilitators. ((CHI/JSI + Palabras Logo))

FRAMEWORK



The following data briefs highlight key findings from this work. Each data brief includes community-specific themes, as well as other universal experiences shared by many Granite Staters, regardless of community or specific identity. Given the impact intersectionality has on any individual's experience, and the unique data sampling within each community, data is generally reported in aggregate with some community-specific references. The community-specific findings are highlighted to demonstrate the compounding challenges many Granite Staters face in achieving their best health and wellness.

“Good health and wellness means to me that you have life free of illnesses and free of stress and depression. If you have such a life, it permits you to have a better life in terms of doing what you want to do and achieving what you want to achieve.”

Culturally Inclusive Systems of Care

Leading by Community: Key Findings

From the Survey:

- **Health insurance** and **mental health** services were both the most common services needed or used as well as the most common services where respondents reported barriers to use.
- **Cost of services** presented a major barrier to accessing services across communities.

In the 2022 Community Engagement Survey, physical and mental health were the most important areas of wellness identified by community members. In this same survey, respondents from the communities involved in this work reported that they had the most difficulty accessing health insurance and mental health services.

Many of the barriers to care reported by the community members engaged in this work mirrored those faced generally by Granite Staters - such as high costs of care, lack of available providers. However, many community members carry the added burden of barriers that can be directly attributed to a piece of their identity.

One **Portuguese-speaking** community member sought a referral to mental health services from their primary care physician, but was given a prescription and no referral for counseling or other support. There was no interpreter available for the visit, so the community member did not feel as though the provider took the time to really listen to their concerns, or make an effort to bridge the language or culture gap. This person opted to return to their country of origin instead for mental health services.

COMMUNICATION ACCESS

Community members who did not speak English as a first language largely connected their experiences with accessing care to how well they could understand and communicate with providers. The majority of community members who talked about language barriers reflected that a lack of information and services available in their preferred language negatively impacted the quality of experience and care.

- Coordinating interpreters adds time and complexity to accessing care
- Front desk and intake staff may not always be aware of language supports available
- Patient experience can be heavily influenced by the interpreter available at the time of the encounter
- Direct translation of written materials from English to other languages may lose important context

SAFE, AFFIRMING CARE

Many community members also shared the experience of not feeling safe to access quality, culturally-specific care for various reasons. Key themes shared around this experience, highlighted below, are often driven by fear driven by stigma, and also the capacity of providers to offer the appropriate care.

Stigma

- Immigration status and fear of law enforcement prevent people from accessing care
- Income and insurance status make finding providers more difficult; people are less likely to seek care
- Non-binary gender identities are inconsistently recognized across systems, contributing to a sense of exclusion.

Culturally appropriate care

- Many providers are not well-trained in the mental health practices and norms of cultures from outside of the United States.
- Insufficient number of providers trained to provide gender-affirming care.

From the Survey: When asked to rank which areas of wellness were most important to them, the average rankings were:

1. Physical Health
2. Mental Health
3. Emotional Wellness
4. Spiritual Wellness
5. Social Wellness

Community and Belonging Matter

Leading by Community: Key Findings

Community members regularly cited the people around them and their communities as fundamental parts of their wellness. They also emphasized the value of belonging and community.

Across communities and data sources, the following themes emerged:

- Social connection and community are crucial to achieving wellness
- Support from peers improves wellness
- Your family's health impacts your health
- Settling interpersonal differences increases a sense of wellness

"We need to talk more and help each other but sometimes we are not as connected and we lose opportunities."

"We only have access to a church - I want more access to other things in the community."

RESPECT AND BELONGING



For many community members, "belonging" means feeling wholly accepted and welcomed by their community, without discrimination. Many community members - especially people who are LGBTQIA+, immigrants, and refugees - shared experiences that limited their feeling of belonging. Some of the commonalities in these experiences include:

- Not being able to access enough support during cultural or identity transitions
- Inability to be forthcoming about their entire identity for fear of discrimination
- Difficult finding enough places to connect with people with shared experiences
- Desiring more visible allies

BUILDING COMMUNITY



Many of the community member reflections around belonging and respect also reflect the importance of creating opportunities to strengthen connections within communities (cultural and geographic), and across communities. Community members across all groups expressed a desire for greater connectedness to help build understanding and kindness to one another.

Similarly, many community members shared frustration that their experiences are not always taken into consideration or their voices are not heard during efforts to make improvements across the state. This feeling of being "invisible" hinders many community members' feeling of connection to the community, which may contribute to greater risk of isolation and poor mental health.

Pathways to Opportunity

Leading by Community: Key Findings

Pathways to Opportunity describes some of the key factors that allow community members to reach their best mental, physical, social, spiritual, and emotional wellness. The key factors selected here to show how much access to opportunity community members have are: Economic Stability, Housing Stability, Education, and Food Security.

From the Survey:

Respondents experiencing housing insecurity strongly disagreed that their region had good housing available. "My region has good housing available" also had the lowest level of agreement across communities.

EDUCATION

Community members expressed a variety of needs related to education. Some notable needs included:

- More easily-accessed communication supports so that parents can better navigate the system and support their children. (ex., developmental screening, special education plans and resources, homework assistance)
- Increased sense of safety and security for children in the schools.
- More resources for social-emotional development, including mentorship opportunities.

FOOD SECURITY

Communities valued healthy food and nutrition highly, but felt that the high cost of healthy food, lack of nutritional information and education, and limited availability of healthy foods in their area were limitations to eating well. This complex mix of challenges was most commonly experienced by community members who were either not born in the United States, or did not speak English as a first language.

ECONOMIC STABILITY

Overwhelmingly, community members felt that while they know how they can improve their health and wellness, cost remains a leading barrier to many pathways to health and wellness. The most common experiences shared across community groups impacting their economic stability were:

- Programs providing financial support are inadequate resourced and hard to navigate
- Employment opportunities are limited by language barriers for those who do not speak English as their first language.

HOUSING STABILITY

Community members shared the need for housing that is both safe and affordable. While there is some support available through charitable and other government-funded programs, those resources are often not adequate to overcome the compounded challenges faced by some communities. Similar to the experiences shared in accessing other kinds of supports, fear and stigma create additional barriers for some community members to secure safe and affordable housing. Examples include:

- Community members not born in the United States fear legal intervention if their status is disclosed during a housing application review.
- Family homes are made unsafe and are no longer stable when family members are not accepting of someone's identity

In support of services for housing insecurity, one participant shared that a charity had provided her with safe housing and she felt the community around her had done the best job they could given the resources at their disposal.

"Affordable housing for undocumented people... We don't have access to safe housing because everyone wants to see citizenship paperwork."

"If you don't eat healthy, or have a good diet, then you become sick. If you don't do any activities like sports and exercise, that's when your body does not function properly."