



Community Engagement – Tips for Public Health Planning

Notes from the North Metropolitan Health Service Local Government Network

Friday 2 December 2022

Local government authorities (LGA) are experts at engaging community and have many processes in place for this. These tips are designed to complement the knowledge and skill set LGAs have by focusing on engagement from a public health planning perspective.

Scoping research – what information is available?

- Review what public health and wellbeing information your internal and external stakeholders have gathered already. This helps to avoid over consultation.
- Refer to the Department of Health's Health and Wellbeing data [presentation](#). The data draws from credible sources using valid and reliable tools addressing a wide range of lifestyle-related risk factors (e.g. nutrition, smoking).
 - Email NMHSHealthPromotion@health.wa.gov.au to request a copy of the Health and Wellbeing report for your LGA.

Deciding on a community engagement method

- Pre-planning is important. Have clear goals and objectives about what information you require and why. Don't engage to simply 'endorse a plan'. Communities expect their time to be used to inform strategies and action will be taken.
- Community consultation is just **one** of the five community engagement strategies outlined in the International Association for Public Participation Community Engagement Level Matrix LGAs can use to develop their public health plan. The level of engagement LGAs choose is determined by their public health planning goals, timeframes and capacity. See [Engagement Methods Tool | Community Engagement | IAP2 Australasia](#) for more information.
- If consultation is appropriate, consider what method(s) would be most suitable. Does it require a quick survey or a more in-depth understanding of the topic that may warrant qualitative methods (e.g. focus groups). Gathering qualitative information can be resource intensive, however it can reveal useful pieces of information (e.g. jargon words used amongst different cultural groups).

Maximising community participation

- Engage your community and key stakeholders on their 'turf' using multiple platforms (e.g. online and at events) and in safe spaces community feel comfortable.
- Use incentives to motivate participation (e.g. vouchers to your local recreation centre).
- Use 'Value-based' messaging in your communications, community engagement questions and branding to build support and understanding of public health and community wellbeing. For more information, refer to the [Value-Based messaging for health promotion](#) resource.

One team, many dreams.

Care / Respect / Innovation / Teamwork / Integrity



Surveys

- Keep surveys succinct. Don't ask questions that would simply be 'nice to know'.
- Provide examples or closed ended questions if you want to identify what your community's priority public health strategies are. This ensures the community's responses fall within the influence and role of local government.
- Ask questions that allow you to 'dig deeper'. For example:
 - If overweight/obesity is an issue, does your community support sporting grounds where children are free from junk food and alcohol advertising?
 - What is the community's level of awareness and/or utilisation of local services/programs?
 - What are the community's attitudes and beliefs towards proposed strategies? E.g. access to safe walking paths.
- Consider minimising the number of open ended questions which are more time-consuming to analyse.
- Consider your community's literacy skills – keep language simple.
- Identify if another LGA or organisation has conducted a similar survey and whether they would be willing to share their questions, methodology and lessons learnt to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Create a feedback loop

Go back to your community to check the strategies/plans that have been determined align with the information gathered from your community.

More information

Please email NMHSHealthPromotion@health.wa.gov.au or phone 9380 7711 if you have any questions.

Additional Resources

- [Public health planning for local government](#)
- [Chapter 3. Assessing Community Needs and Resources | Section 7. Conducting Needs Assessment Surveys | Main Section | Community Tool Box \(ku.edu\)](#)
- [Western Australian Community Impact Hub](#)

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