



Leveraging Hospital Community Benefits to Reduce the Burden of Tobacco Use

This fact sheet provides information about what hospital community benefits are and how tobacco control advocates can work with local nonprofit hospitals to promote tobacco-free environments.

Hospitals can be powerful allies in the fight against tobacco. Not only do hospitals play an important role in the treatment of tobacco-related disease, but they can also help communities prevent tobacco use through their investment in community benefits. This fact sheet details what hospital community benefits are. It also provides information about how tobacco control advocates can build or enhance existing relationships with local nonprofit hospitals by partnering with them to invest in community benefits that promote a tobacco-free environment.

What are Hospital Community Benefits?

The federal government and California state government both require nonprofit hospitals to demonstrate how they are helping the communities they serve. This requirement is commonly referred to as “hospital community benefits.”^{1, 2}



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Federal law

To qualify for tax exempt status, all nonprofit hospitals must, under federal law, show the IRS they are a benefit to their local community. Once a year, nonprofit hospitals are required to report on such activities as charity care,^{*} community health improvement services, and the cash and in-kind donations they provided in the previous tax year.^{3,4}

As of 2012, hospitals must also conduct community health needs assessments, as part of the Affordable Care Act's new requirements.¹ Each nonprofit hospital is expected to

- Conduct a community health needs assessment (CHNA) every three years.¹
- Specifically consider the primary and chronic disease needs of medically underserved, low-income or minority populations' health indicators and health outcomes in the hospital's community.⁴
- Collect input from local community members and those with public health knowledge and expertise.¹
- Develop and implement a CHNA implementation plan that is designed to meet the needs identified during the CHNA.¹
- Make the results of the CHNA and implementation plan widely available to the public.¹

California state law

Under California state law, hospital community benefits include "activities that are intended to address community needs and priorities, primarily through disease prevention and improvement of health status,"² such as

- Financial or in-kind support of public health programs.²
- Donation of funds, property, or other resources that contribute to a community priority.²
- Services offered that do not result in a financial return. These services include health promotion, health education, and prevention activities, which are designed to meet a community need in the area served by the hospital.²

Additionally, nonprofit hospitals must submit community needs assessments and community benefit plans to the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD).⁵

These plans are available at: www.oshpd.ca.gov/HID/SubmitData/CommunityBenefit/Plan_2011.html

^{*} Charity care is the amount of free or discounted care hospitals provide for patients unable to pay for medical bills.²

What do Hospital Community Benefits Mean for Tobacco Control Advocates?

Hospital community benefit requirements represent an opportunity for tobacco control advocates to connect with hospitals, in pursuit of a shared agenda to improve population-based health. Hospitals are anchor institutions who engage local communities in myriad ways beyond providing direct medical care. Many hospitals work to provide health education classes, host health fairs, train current and future health professionals, provide community support, build coalitions, and participate in community health improvement advocacy.⁴ More importantly, because of their work in the community, hospitals are a powerful voice for health and can be a strong voice for change.

In particular, the community health needs assessment process provides tobacco control advocates with an opportunity to

- Educate hospital administrations about the burden of tobacco in their local communities.
- Encourage hospital administrations to include and prioritize the prevalence of tobacco use in their list of community health needs.
- Influence the strategies and services hospitals choose to implement to meet community health needs, like the burden of tobacco use in their communities.

By becoming involved in the community health needs assessment process, tobacco control advocates can help hospitals identify and prioritize a variety of upstream policy level interventions that limit tobacco use.





How Can Tobacco Control Advocates Get Involved with the Hospital CHNA Process?

As described on page 2, each nonprofit hospital is required to conduct a community health needs assessment and report on a range of topics including the⁴

- Demographics of the hospital's communities.
- Health needs of the hospital's communities.
- Primary and chronic disease needs of uninsured, low-income, and minority groups in the hospital's communities.
- The hospital's process for identifying and prioritizing community health needs and services to meet the needs of its communities.
- The hospital's process for obtaining input from individuals with special knowledge of or expertise in public health.

The following are just some of the ways tobacco control advocates can contribute to a hospital's community health needs assessment:

- Participate in hospital efforts to obtain input from community members and public health partners in order to educate hospitals about the impact of tobacco use.
- Collect and share data about tobacco use in the community, such as total prevalence and prevalence by age, gender, race and national origin.

- Collect and share information about the availability of cessation benefits and in particular, about populations that lack access to cessation support.
- Collect and share information about the number of tobacco retailers in the hospital's community, tobacco retailers' proximity to youth sensitive areas, and/or the density of tobacco retailers in low-income neighborhoods.
- Collect and share information about the community's retail environment, such as the location and prevalence of tobacco advertising or the availability of flavored and/or cheap tobacco products.
- Collect and share information about secondhand smoke exposure and populations who are most likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke.
- Collect and share information about tobacco-related health inequities that exist within a hospital community. For example, some hospitals might not realize rates of tobacco use and tobacco-related health outcomes vary significantly from neighborhood to neighborhood or among uninsured, low-income, or minority populations.

How Can Tobacco Control Advocates Get Involved with the Adoption and Execution of a Hospital's CHNA Implementation Strategies?

After completing the community health needs assessment, hospitals are required to adopt an implementation plan to address the health needs identified through the CHNA process. There are many ways hospitals can support policy, systems, and environmental-level tobacco control interventions. Here are just a few examples of activities that tobacco control advocates can ask hospital administrations to consider:

- Support smokefree policies by providing cessation classes for community members, especially those impacted by newly adopted policies such as smokefree housing policies.
- Work with public health entities and other clinical care providers to share aggregate data pulled from electronic health records. Use this data to identify and target interventions (both programmatic and policy-related) to neighborhoods with the highest prevalence of smoking, smoking attributable disease, and/or smoking-related hospitalizations.
- Help increase the effectiveness of tobacco control policies by raising awareness and mobilizing community members around the implementation of new policies. For example, hospitals can offer to hold (or support) community and school meetings about the importance of restricting youth access to tobacco products when a community is implementing a new tobacco retailer licensing ordinance.⁷
- Adopt a tobacco-free campus policy and mentor other businesses and organizations within the community that want to follow suit.
- Lend the expertise of the hospital's communications teams to support hard-hitting educational campaigns that inspire people to quit.
- Participate on and/or provide financial support to tobacco control coalitions and their policy work.
- Write letters or otherwise publicly support local policies like tobacco-free pharmacies, smokefree air laws, tobacco sales restrictions, and price and minimum pack size restrictions.

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Resources

ChangeLab Solutions has model policies, toolkits, fact sheets, webinars, and infographics that tobacco control advocates can use when working with local hospitals to design implementation plans that respond to community health needs assessments. For more information, visit www.changelabsolutions.org/tobacco-control

Bibliography

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