

Ohio's COVID-19 Populations Needs Assessment

Minimizing the Disparate Impact of the Pandemic and Building Foundations for Health Equity



This document contains excerpts from the full report, which can be found here: <https://go.osu.edu/inequitable-burdens-covid-19>

Executive Summary

Ohio's COVID-19 Populations Needs Assessment is a statewide evaluation that aims to improve the ability of Ohioans to prevent COVID-19 transmission and minimize its impacts on communities. Based on input from 363 stakeholders representing six Ohio populations, this document describes critical barriers these communities face and recommends strategies for overcoming each barrier. This *Needs Assessment* describes specific actions that networks of collaborators at community, local, and state levels can take to facilitate access to COVID-19 protections, reduce infections and deaths, and set the stage for long-term reduced health disparities and improved health outcomes across the state. The *Needs Assessment* can be used to inform COVID-19 response, recovery, research, and policy formulation activities.

Which **populations** are included in the *Needs Assessment*?

The *Needs Assessment* focuses on six populations, selected because they are at risk for disproportionate burdens of disease and death during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Black and African American Communities
- Latino and Hispanic Communities
- Asian and Asian American Communities
- Immigrant and Refugee Communities
- Rural Communities
- People with Disabilities

Which **public health strategies** are considered in the *Needs Assessment*?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends eight specific practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The *Needs Assessment* asked community members and representatives from each population to reflect on their community's use of each of these recommended behaviors.

- Hygiene (hand washing and surface cleaning)
- Social Distancing
- Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- COVID-19 testing
- Contact tracing
- Isolation (for infected individuals)
- Self-Quarantine (for exposed individuals)
- Healthcare Access

What are the **goals** of the *Needs Assessment*?

- Identify the unique needs of communities at risk of disparate burden of disease and death due to COVID-19
- Describe the barriers communities face to using CDC-recommended behaviors for COVID-19 protection
- Make data-driven recommendations about public health interventions that will reduce the disparate impact of COVID-19 across Ohio's communities and support long-term population wellness
- Make data-driven recommendations about how to design, resource, and implement these interventions across the state

What **methods** does the *Needs Assessment* use to achieve these goals?

Representatives of each population completed a survey composed primarily of open-ended questions about the use of CDC-recommended COVID-protective strategies within their communities. Stakeholders included leaders of ethnic, religious, and other community-based organizations, social service providers and local public health workers, healthcare providers, and other community members.

For every CDC-recommended strategy, the survey asked population representatives to describe:

- **Barriers** their community faces in following each suggested public health strategy
- **Cultural** or situational concerns that should be considered in encouraging the public health strategy in their community
- **Ideas** about what could be done to help members of their community access the encouraged practice
- **Stories** that demonstrate how the recommended practice impacts members of their community
- **Strengths** of their community
- **Sources** of health information, healthcare, and other resources trusted within their community

Data provided by these stakeholder respondents were analyzed using a multi-layer, iterative process. The research team extracted common ideas and themes shared by population representatives. Panels of experts then examined these preliminary findings to provide context for the ideas articulated by community stakeholders and ensure that the research team understood them accurately. Expert panels were composed of state-level leaders from each population, academic researchers, and public health practitioners. The research team next identified patterns that cut across the various populations and public health strategies. This yielded key recommendations designed to improve both access to COVID-related protections and long-term health outcomes across Ohio.

What are the **central findings** of the *Needs Assessment*?

The populations studied in this *Needs Assessment* face substantial barriers to using each of the public health strategies recommended to prevent transmission of COVID-19 and mitigate its impacts on communities. Respondents articulated not only the nuances of these barriers, but also the many ways they impede COVID-protective behavior, and a clear sense of urgency about the need to resolve them.

These barriers include:

- Serious gaps in access to necessary resources
- COVID-unsafe working conditions in essential jobs
- Specific public health advice inconsistent with community values
- Lack of information and COVID-related education
- Stigma and mental health challenges
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Lack of personal transportation
- Dense and poor housing conditions
- Language and communication barriers
- Racism, xenophobia, and able-ism
- Immigration-related fears
- Political beliefs
- Mistrust of government authorities and healthcare providers

Solutions to these barriers must be developed with input and assistance from members of each community and deployed in direct partnership with community-based organizations. Community centered interventions will require collaborative effort, but will alleviate barriers to multiple COVID-protective behaviors at the same time.

What are the **key recommendations** of the *Needs Assessment*?

Eight top-level recommendations emerged from *Needs Assessment* data and analyses. These key recommendations focus on actions that will have the strongest positive impact on reducing COVID-related burdens on Ohio's marginalized communities, as well as the longest-lasting public health impact for populations across the state. Each recommendation would mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 in multiple populations by improving access to multiple protective behaviors. Because they address social determinants of health and institutionalized oppression, these recommended actions will also help to reduce health disparities and improve long-term health outcomes throughout Ohio.

Top-Level Recommendations from *Ohio's COVID-19 Populations Needs Assessment*

1. Center the COVID-19 response in the organizations and cultures of local communities
2. Explicitly address economic injustice and its widespread health and social impacts by directly providing resources
3. Directly address racism and immigration-related fears
4. Strengthen employment policy and other relevant public policies
5. Increase access to affordable, low-density housing
6. Improve public and shared transportation services
7. Improve the quality of COVID-related education and increase its dissemination
8. Address language and communication barriers

The following mechanisms are suggested to help achieve these top-level *Needs Assessment* recommendations.

- Take a multi-sectoral community-based approach
- Integrate interventions across COVID-19 protective strategies
- Launch interventions at multiple levels (e.g.: state, regional, local, neighborhood, workplace)
- Expand existing centers-of-community into centers of COVID-19 response
- Create and expand community health worker capacity
- Align goals and strategies, and collaborate to maximize progress toward health equity

What will **readers** find in this *Needs Assessment* report?

The full-length *Needs Assessment* report contains:

- Details of the context, objectives, and methods of the *Needs Assessment*
- Findings and recommendations specific to each of the six *Needs Assessment* focus populations, sorted into three categories:
 - Immediate, COVID-19 specific recommendations
 - Immediate recommendations to improve the health of communities
 - Recommendations to create a social context for long-term health and wellness
- Findings specific to each of the eight CDC-recommended practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19
- Detailed explanation of eight top-level *Needs Assessment* recommendations for minimizing the impact of COVID-19 on Ohio's populations
- Mechanisms for achieving the eight top-level recommendations
- Stories and examples in the words of *Needs Assessment* respondents
- Action recommendations for key audiences of the *Needs Assessment*, including:
 - State-level leaders and legislators
 - Local public health authorities and social service agencies
 - Community leaders and organizations
 - Healthcare institutions and providers
 - Public and private funders
 - Universities, researchers, and subject-matter experts
- Lists of trusted community organizations, resources, and linkages for each focus population

For additional information or consultations about implementing the recommendations of this report, please contact CPH-COVID19NeedsAssessment@osu.edu.