

Aligning Systems with Communities to Advance Equity Through Shared Measurement: Community Listening Summary—Boston, MA

The various systems within communities—such as public health, housing, education, and health care—directly influence the health and well-being of community members. One system cannot address the holistic needs and concerns of community members, so systems must work with each other and with community members to collectively align their actions with the needs and priorities of the communities they serve. Shared measurement is one way to do this. Shared measurement uses a common set of measurable goals that reflect shared priorities across systems and with community members.

Ultimately, shared measurement must benefit people and communities, especially those who have experienced health and social inequities. Partnering with community members is essential to ensure that improvement efforts reflect what matters to communities. The American Institutes for Research and Community-Campus Partnerships for Health partnered with the Multicultural AIDS Coalition, a local community-based organization, to listen to seven community members in the greater Boston, MA, area, all of whom were immigrants or first-generation immigrants who represented six countries. This listening session was held in August 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic and a time of national attention on racial equity and justice. This document summarizes what these community members had experienced with systems and services and what is most important to them when systems and services work together toward a common goal.



Community Partner Profile: Multicultural AIDS Coalition

The Multicultural AIDS Coalition (MAC) launched in 1989 in response to the lack of resources aimed at addressing the HIV epidemic among some of the most vulnerable populations. Its mission is to mobilize communities of color to end the HIV epidemic, while working to ensure high-quality, accessible services for people living with HIV or at risk for HIV and sexually transmitted infections. MAC supports efforts to eradicate conditions that fuel the epidemic, such as poverty; substance abuse; lack of access to health care; homelessness; food insecurity; immigration status; incarceration; and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. As an established grassroots organization, MAC is well positioned to deliver services to populations impacted by inequities, because it understands local communities, has developed a culturally appropriate network of providers, and has close linkages to people and organizations with the greatest access to marginalized individuals.

To learn more about MAC, visit <https://www.mac-boston.org/>.

What do community members want to see improved?

Community members identified with multiple community groups (e.g., geographic region/city, country of birth). This identification greatly influenced how the community members defined community and thought about ways to improve communities. Many of the improvements that community members envisioned centered on celebrating their cultural differences and respecting the education and expertise learned from their home countries. Specifically, community members discussed creating a new system to help recent immigrants integrate more successfully into American society by providing educational, professional, social, and economic supports.

So the system that needs to be created is a system that supports people to take them as they are, and to make them better people and better family and community and citizens. So it needs to enhance their job skills and enhance, not add, because a lot of people already come with the language and understanding of the language, which are two different things. [The system] needs to enhance their knowledge of finances in this country, credit in this country, and how to navigate banking in this country, which is completely different.

Additionally, community members desired more professional opportunities, educational and recreational opportunities for youth, and community involvement in government.

How can community members have an equal role in improvement initiatives?

Community members stated that having an equal and meaningful role in improvement initiatives (i.e., a “seat at the table”), being able to influence change, and having leaders listen to their feedback would make them feel valued and heard.

When I gave my feedback, they listen. So that tells me that they value my opinion and that I had a voice in the process.

One way I would know is like somebody said earlier, “My voice is heard,” that I'm able to sit at a table and I am able to influence change, and having my voice heard and being able to ensure that change happens in a positive way for everybody else in the community.

How can communities hold systems and leaders accountable?

Community members discussed several ways they would like to hold government and systems leaders accountable in their efforts to improve the well-being of the community. Members suggested requiring government and politicians to have documented and well-defined goals, having opportunities to ask leaders questions about priorities and progress, and documenting all aspects for later reference. However, documentation and greater transparency and opportunities to hold leaders accountable are not cultural norms for some community members, so these aspects would need to be reinforced for some.

The starting point for accountability, I think it also should be setting specific well-defined goals. Because if we don't have well-defined goals for the leaders, when they are taking specific roles, specific offices, it will be difficult for us to be able to hold them accountable. Because coming

from Nigeria, we've dealt with all kinds of leaders, of course, across Africa. [If] we don't have well-defined goals, how we want to handle a case like this, then it's easy for any leader to come at any point and make whatever decisions based on personal interests, political positions, or whatever. So I think within our communities, we need to have clearly defined goals for our leaders. So that from period to period, we can hold them accountable, using those defined goals to be able to question them. And I think that's the starting point that we need to look at.

How do you know improvements work for everyone?

Community members stressed the importance of sharing resources and knowledge so that the entire community can benefit from opportunities.

“That's the thing, if people know about stuff, tell other people, bring other people. I mean, the more people you tell, the more educational activities we have or awareness activities that we have in a community will make people see that all these things [are] available that can help all of us.”



Community-Identified Priorities

- Develop a system to help immigrants better understand and navigate the various health, public health, human, social, and economic systems in the United States
- Document local, community-led initiatives and their impacts to use for additional funding opportunities
- Create opportunities for community members to ask government and systems leaders specific questions that build accountability

Contributors

Multicultural AIDS Coalition & Greater Boston, MA, area community members.

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