



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

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 Healthy Washington Heights, a local community-based organization, to listen to three community members in the Chicago, IL, area. This listening session was held in July 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: Healthy Washington Heights

Healthy Washington Heights is a clearinghouse for community health-related resources that increase healthy behaviors and healthy lifestyles of the people who live, work, and worship in the Washington Heights community of Chicago, IL, and the surrounding neighborhoods to the south. This is achieved through partnerships, health education, awareness activities, certifications, community engaged research, and activism. Programming includes the mobilization of community health workers and members of community garden and walking clubs. Healthy Washington Heights was founded in 2009 as part of the City of Chicago's Healthy Communities effort.

To learn more about Healthy Washington Heights, visit www.healthywashingtonheights.org/.

What do community members want to see improved?

Community members desired short- and long-term improvements in education, health care, housing, senior services, policing and public safety, economic development, and transportation. Specifically, community members wanted policies about schools, health care facilities and services, affordable housing, and policing in lower income or communities of color to be equitable to those in Chicago's wealthier neighborhoods.

Community members stated that these improvements would help to strengthen Chicago's already diverse, strong, and resilient communities.

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

Community members said that communities should be involved as equal partners in improvement efforts, including shaping program and meeting agendas and setting priorities for improvement efforts.

Community members also highlighted the importance of ensuring meaningful engagement among systems and community leaders, such as having discussions with community members instead of "talking at" them.

Community members noted the significance of creating systems that do not hinder participation. Currently, community members are not compensated for their time at community meetings. In addition, most residents cannot attend meetings that occur during the workday because they may work multiple jobs or alternative work shifts or have difficulty making ends meet with low-wage jobs.

[W]e have a lot of working-class single-family homes where people are at work, they're trying to make a living. They [are] not thinking about what's going on in the community because they [are] just trying to get by. You talking about come to a meeting after I had worked 12, 15 hours and I got to go to my second job, that's just not their priority, and I get that. Again, having affordable wages is definitely important because if people are making adequate wages, then they can be more of a player participatory role in their community.

How can communities hold systems and leaders accountable?

Community members suggested that primary ways to hold systems and leaders accountable include questioning leaders, having term limits for them, and establishing an independent oversight or audit team to oversee their work and actions.

Well, I think following the fidelity. I think we need outside people. I mean, for Chicago, we have been known for being very crooked. Our politicians, they do what they want to do. I think in order to have that accountability, you need an outside entity making sure people are doing what they say they're going to do until we see that they're able to have that personal accountability to the communities that they took oath to. We have a lot of aldermen who've been in office for decades.

I don't think people should be in a job for all these years. No, give it to somebody else because this is what we're starting to see, common trends and themes of people who are over abusing power when they've been in office all this time.

Additionally, community members indicated they hold power as tax payers funding systems in the community. They wanted to have a way to withhold funding if their needs are not met by these systems. This mechanism would give community members a direct way to hold systems accountable for the services they provide. Media, through journalism and investigative reporting, was also suggested as a useful tool to observe and investigate leaders' actions and hold them accountable.

The systems that we pay for, right? So none of this is something that they're doing out of the goodness of their heart. We pay for public health. We pay for public services. We pay for the health care systems that are in our area, and we need to be able to tell them, "This is what we need," and demand it because if you don't give it to us, we have a way to shut you down. We have a way to walk away from you. We have a way to organize and make you give it to us.

Community members also noted the importance and need for more transparency about information and data that are relevant to the community.

How do you know improvements work for everyone?

Community members agreed that improvements are successful when everyone could have their needs met within their communities regardless of race or income. They also mentioned seeing results through numbers and facts, such as school enrollment and graduation rates, wait times for accessing services, number and type of health care facilities, crime rates, life expectancy, and other disparities. Overall, community members would know that improvements are working for everyone "when they see it."

It's easier to see the negative than it is to see the positive. I'm not sure that there's a metric to tell you that things are getting better, but you know it when you see it. It might just be a feeling, and there's a lot of inaction that happens because people say, "Well, there's nothing we can do about that." Well, it's not [that] there's nothing you can do about it. There might not be something that you can measure, but we'll know it when we see it. Go ahead and do it because it's the right thing to do. It doesn't always have to be something that is strictly tangible in order for it to be right.



Community-Identified Priorities

- Have a living wage that would help more community members participate in community improvement efforts
- Partner with community members in planning, creating meeting agendas, and setting priorities
- Establish an external oversight office to hold leaders and systems accountable
- Create an opportunity for community members to withhold systems funding as part of accountability efforts

Contributors

Healthy Washington Heights & Chicago, IL, community members

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