



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

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 Colorado Black Health Collaborative, a local community-based organization, to listen to five community members in the Denver, CO, area. 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 to work together toward a common goal.



Community Partner Profile: Colorado Black Health Collaborative

The Colorado Black Health Collaborative is a community-based organization that is committed to improving health and wellness in Colorado's Black, African, and African American communities through collaborations, partnerships, and teaming arrangements with community-based, non-profit, and public organizations and with private entities and government agencies. Its mission is to achieve health equity in Colorado's Black community by providing such communities with resources for sustaining optimal health and well-being.

To learn more about Colorado Black Health Collaborative, visit <https://coloradoblackhealth.org/>.

What do community members want to see improved?

Community members desired improvements in many systems with the ultimate goal of reducing inequities for communities of color in the Denver area. This included improvements to housing, transportation, education, economy, public safety, infrastructure, and food access in their communities.

First and foremost, what I would really like to see improve is the level of inequities that we have based on race and ethnicity and the lack of opportunities for people of color in the community. For example, in the community, the neighborhood I live [in], there's no community standard. There are plans to build one in the next 3 to 5 years. They just built a park maybe 3 years ago. So the built environment is lacking. Consequently, it's also a food desert. Consequently, people are eating unhealthy because first and foremost, they don't have the money nor do they have the place to go to buy food. So I'd like to see that we would reduce food deserts. It would improve the built environment, would improve the overall quality of health. And we'd improve the inequities that are happening in the community. And with that improvement, I would like to see us building and creating more opportunities for people to become leaders.

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

Overwhelmingly, community members said having an equal role in improvement initiatives required having meaningful participation in community meetings, initiative planning, and decision making. They stated that community members needed to be treated fairly and with respect to feel that their voices and input matter to systems and city leaders, including city councilmembers, the mayor, and state and federal agencies.

Well, I'd have to see people at the table. People who are being treated as equals in the process instead of people making decisions, like [another community member] said. They made these decisions based on one part of the community and not on another part. So to see the people who are being impacted by the community at the table, having a voice, being treated fairly, being compensated for their time and knowing that their voices that are going to be heard, that it's going to be taken seriously and they will be treated with dignity and respect.

Community members also discussed the impact of structural racism in their communities and the need for White allies because input from communities of color is often overlooked or disregarded.

To me, that's where the allies come in. . . . So even though we're at the table, our words sometimes, our words and our thoughts and ideas are looked over unless a White person said the same thing I said. Then they say, "Oh, that's a great idea." That's how you have to start manipulating the system, the way the system manipulates us. So we have to learn to manipulate the system, learn to know the rules so we know how to maneuver or manipulate the system.

How can communities hold systems and leaders accountable?

Regular reporting and communication with local government and systems were the basis of accountability for community members. Routine reports with important metrics (such as mortality rates and COVID-19 rates) showing progress and funding allocation were important to community members. Additionally, they felt that regular community meetings would be a useful method to receive community-specific information and allow them to ask questions of leaders.

[I] sometimes think that makes our leaders uncomfortable, that we're asking them for specific questions. We don't want broad overall. We know the broad overall. We want you to narrow it down and make it specifically about this community and what it is that we can do and the questions that we have. And I think that it makes them uncomfortable.

Community members also stated that establishing community advisory groups or a pay-for-performance structure for government and systems officials would help to keep leaders accountable for their actions.

I was just thinking about pay for performance. If I don't do my job, I get fired or I get reprimanded or I get my pay cut. Things that hit them just like it would hit anybody else. I think part of the problem is that when you get into a certain position in leadership, and then you have a certain amount of power, the accountability structure changes somehow. And I don't think it should. . . . It should be a partnership of people who utilize the public services that these folks are running. More than just the community. I think people really need to feel like they're beholden to their constituents.

How do you know improvements work for everyone?

Community members said that they would know improvements are benefitting everyone when they see it in the data and through tangible impacts in their communities.

We see people that are moving up equally. We see less food deserts and more better-built environment and sidewalks. We see less diabetes and less heart disease. To me, this has been systemic and cultural for over 500 years. It's like how do we change it? We're working on it little by little, and we can't give up, but there's a whole historical trauma and historical genocide that brings that to where we are today. I think that for everyone, that means everyone has to improve. Everyone has to move up. Everyone needs a job. Everyone needs to have a place to live.

Additionally, community members stated that improvements would be working for everyone when public outcry about inequality, particularly regarding criminal justice and public safety, was no longer needed. In particular, they discussed Elijah McClain, a young Black man who died at the hands of Aurora, CO, police; the lack of an official investigation regarding his death; and the impact it has had in their communities.



Community-Identified Priorities

- Provide reports to community members and community-based organizations that provide data on problems or issues, show progress toward goals, and show funding for initiatives
- Establish community advisory groups comprised of representatives from multiple communities in the city to provide input to systems and government officials
- Create a pay-for-performance type of structure to hold government leaders accountable for their actions outside the election cycle
- Create initiatives to help community members understand the basics of data and increase their knowledge of metrics so they can better comprehend the impacts of improvement efforts

Contributors

Colorado Black Health Collaborative & Denver, CO, community members

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