



# NEW HAVEN HEALTH SURVEY COMMUNITY FORUM REPORT

## SATURDAY, MAY 7, 2016



The Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE), was established in 2007 to identify solutions to health challenges through community action research. CARE's mission is *to improve the health of New Haven residents*. CARE, a partnership between the New Haven community and the Yale School of Public Health, is taking action against chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma and heart and lung disease that threaten the health of our community.

Through a variety of community-based research projects, CARE has been taking the pulse of our city's health, including a neighborhood health survey conducted every three years. Our third survey was conducted in the fall of 2015 with 1,187 residents from six of New Haven's low-income neighborhoods: Dixwell, Fair Haven, Hill North, Newhallville, West River/Dwight and West Rock/West Hills. Residents answered questions about their health, diet, exercise, smoking habits, social support and neighborhood safety.

To build on the survey results and encourage neighborhood residents to take action in their community, CARE hosted a community forum on May 7, 2016. More than 100 people participated to learn more about health in their neighborhoods and to strategize ways to bring *evidence to action*. Following a brief presentation of survey results, participants split into breakout groups by neighborhood: Dixwell/Newhallville, Fair Haven, West River/Dwight, West Rock, and two citywide groups for people who live outside the city (e.g., staff from local community-based organizations). Break out group sessions were facilitated by Community Mediation. Each breakout group discussed survey results and priority issues. Participants were encouraged to brainstorm strategies to reduce health inequities in their neighborhood. They were invited to apply for a \$1500 grant from CARE to implement their proposals. To nurture creative thinking, major points made by each breakout group were illustrated by local artists.

Summaries of each discussion group and their recommendations are detailed in this report.

## NEIGHBORHOOD BREAKOUT GROUPS SUMMARY

### Dixwell and Newhallville

Dixwell and Newhallville residents were not surprised by the data that were presented, including the extreme levels of food insecurity and the lack of nutritious food choices. Residents were aware of the root causes of these conditions, such as low income and limited access to healthy food options. In Dixwell, residents highlighted safety and their desire to clean up the neighborhood. Likewise, Newhallville residents also would like to focus on improving the physical environment of the neighborhood. Newhallville residents also prioritized jobs, parent involvement with schools, youth centers, drugs/violence and obesity.

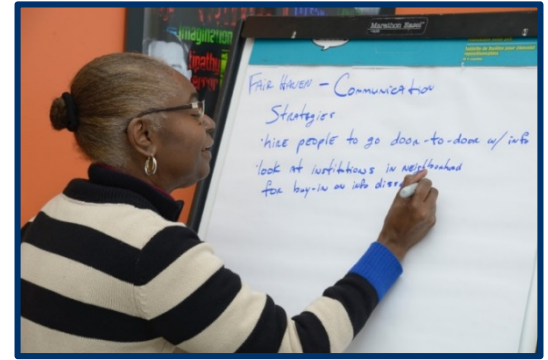


#### Strategies for Dixwell:

- Install speed bumps, e.g., near Dixwell Senior Housing, Orchard/Henry Streets, Gibb Street, and Sheffield Avenue
- Fix pot holes, e.g., by Henry, Orchard, and Goff Streets
- Clean up streets
- Plant flowers
- Sweep sidewalks
- Make absentee landlords more accountable
- Increase city support, e.g., contact alders, join Mayor’s Night Out

#### Strategies for Newhallville:

- Create a vegetable garden in the empty lot at Bassett & Newhallville
- Create a tree-trimming crew to remove potentially dangerous trees
- Repair sidewalks
- Clean up and encourage residents to take pride in our neighborhood
- Organize block parties/cleanups
- Resurrect block watch with new name (“block watch” worries some residents)
- Educate residents about the laws
- Increase accountability from the city – how are they using our taxes?
  - Increase police presence
  - Enforce speed limits
  - Insist on street sweeping more often
- Have representatives at Mayor’s Night Out
- Document conversations, then go in numbers to monthly management team meetings
- Explore ways to increase home-ownership vs. rentals



## Fair Haven

Fair Haven has the highest Hispanic population out of the six low-income neighborhoods surveyed. The high proportion of food insecurity among residents (40%) was the most serious concern. They were also concerned about the high proportion of women with asthma in their neighborhood. Low rates of homeownership and issues related to absentee landlords were also discussed. Participants in the forum said that they felt safer in their own neighborhood than the survey results documented for residents overall. Finally, they expressed concern that there was no mention of drug use in the survey.<sup>1</sup> They suggest a study related to this issue, given its impact on health and safety.

Residents believed that the data reinforced the difference between Fair Haven and other, more affluent, New Haven neighborhoods. They also felt, however, that they each offered a personal and unique perspective about life in Fair Haven, which influenced how they felt about their neighborhood, and which cannot be captured in a survey. Areas of focus for Fair Haven included a commitment to build a community center, increase transportation options, insure access to healthy and sufficient food, particularly for older adults, and improve mental health, and a strong desire to increase communication and strengthen relationships.

### Strategies for Fair Haven:

- Create a “universal” community space where residents can convene together for neighborhood events
- Raise funding to leverage use of existing space that is currently under-utilized (e.g., schools; pay utility bill or monthly fee)
- Create more open access and user-friendly community gardens
- Allow youth to have more say in community activities and expenditure of local resources
- Increase communication
  - Identify institutions in the neighborhood for buy-in on information dissemination and support such as the libraries, clinics and churches
  - Create an information desk staffed with volunteers
  - Hire people to go door-to-door with health information
  - Create a neighborhood resource guide
  - Utilize billboards/multiple types of communication
  - Create a programmed electronic display board, strategically located in the neighborhood

<sup>1</sup> Drug use was not explored in the 2015 survey. Given that drug use is illegal, we decided this was not the appropriate survey for these sensitive questions.

## West River/Dwight

West River/Dwight residents were impressed by how well the data matched their own concerns. They were especially concerned by the data on violence in their neighborhood. They were alarmed by the number of people directly affected by gun violence, including the 1 in 5 who knew someone who had been killed by gun violence. Residents were not surprised by the high rates of chronic disease and the high burden of asthma and obesity, especially given the cost of healthy options. However, they expected the rates of certain diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, to be higher. Residents have been very active in their own community organizing efforts to improve health, and wanted to continue to strengthen their efforts by increasing access to healthy food options, empowering youth and improving safety.



### *Strategies for West River/Dwight:*

- Focus on what has been accomplished in our neighborhood – create resources in communities and continue to do what works
- Increase accessibility to healthy foods – farmer’s markets, corner stores and more
- Empower youth and improve lives of young people through mentoring
- Build a sense of social responsibility among young people and include them in neighborhood organizing
- Job training and expose young people to alternative careers (e.g., some interest in horse camps)
- Create a forum for sharing human resource and talent – volunteers with energy and commitment
- Provide more opportunities for daycare, afterschool programs and summer camp
- Address safety issues – police, drugs, violence, bike lanes, safe spaces to do healthy activities
- Address high traffic areas (e.g., Route 34) - safer streets, less pollution (parking garages/emissions)
- Partner with other individuals and institutions external to the community to identify additional financial and other resources
- Work together to develop long term solutions

## West Rock

West Rock residents were surprised by the high rates of cancer and asthma in their neighborhood. The breast cancer rate is higher in New Haven than nationwide, and many residents did not realize that asthma was such a problem in New Haven. West Rock is one of New Haven's most isolated neighborhoods, with limited access to resources like stores and restaurants. West Rock residents focused their strategies on community cohesion, connection and communications (accessibility of information). They focused using and leveraging on many resources available to New Haven residents like community meetings, reaching out to alders, and using *See, Click, Fix*.



### Strategies for West Rock:

- Create a West Rock Community Center or recreation center to offer activities
- Develop classes for exercise, cooking, diabetes education, etc.
- Encourage management team communicate more effectively with residents, and have residents get more involved with the management team
- Get together with neighbors
- Put up community bulletin boards/kiosks
- Create telephone trees/email chains
- Send emails to alderpersons
- Use See Click Fix
- Insist on greater police presence
- Host more activities in Edgewood Park – a great local asset
- Develop walking trails in the park and create signage and lighting to enhance the quality
- Walk to activities with a child and form walking groups with specific times to view sights, architecture, gardens



### Citywide Groups

Participants in the citywide group were most surprised by social issues rather than the rates of health conditions presented in the report. In particular, they discussed the low income levels – especially people living at or below \$15,000 – unemployment, and wages; safe and clean housing. They also discussed the percentage of people afraid to go out in the daytime, food insecurity and lack of SNAP availability, children’s issues, and the rate of asthma in women. They expressed concern about the percentage of people who have witnessed gun violence and the health effects of being safe and comfortable in your neighborhood. The lack of trust survey participants felt with their neighbors was also concerning. Participants in this group were not surprised by the lack of food options, locations, and store prices.



Based on the findings of the neighborhood report, participants suggested focusing on access to better food/nutrition, education about and awareness of healthy food, food insecurity and lack of healthy and nutritious options. They identified these as ways to help offset the increasing rates of chronic disease. Additionally, they saw children not being outside as a problem, caused by lack of places, no one to play with, electronics, and lack of funding. Participants also focused on city planning and raising productivity and awareness through pamphlets and the website. They strategized about safety, asset-mounting, and social cohesion. The next steps identified by this group include neighborhood walks, sessions with nutritionists/chefs, community gardens, and a prayer garden at Thomas Chapel.

### Citywide Strategies

- Establish a city health fund endowment
- Provide education and awareness; community health, healthy cooking, and exercise programs (e.g., evening classes at Cornell Hill Health Center);
- Use technology to get information out; put resources online
- Use neighborhood apps and social networks
- Connect to churches
- Keep general neighborhood messages (email, phone, etc.) short & precise
- Hold community-based meetings (e.g., dinners, block parties)
- Assess food pantries and educating about types of foods given to customers
- Provide healthy alternatives in each store aisle
- Engage the community in a way that fosters trust and respect
- Encourage greater engagement from political leaders, including local leaders
- Conduct a deeper analysis of specific neighborhood needs
- Enforce smoking policies and making smoking cessation resources more available

## **Conclusion**

As David Brooks of the New York Times recently wrote, *“A society of empowered local neighborhood organizations is a learning society. Experiments happen and information about how to solve problems flows from the bottom up.”*

Mayor Harp closed out the day with inspiring remarks, encouraging resident involvement in their neighborhoods to help solve these complex health problems. She expressed her own commitment to building the healthiest city and called upon the group to join her in action.

This community forum brought together more than 100 individuals from throughout New Haven and the greater New Haven area. Participants engaged in thought-provoking conversations about the findings of CARE and DataHaven’s surveys, the recent successes and areas for improvement, and the myriad ways to improve neighborhood health. By including city residents and staff from local organizations, the forum aimed to bring together people who knew their neighborhood and were best able to identify potential approaches to improve it. Over the summer, CARE will award several \$1500 mini-grants to support neighborhood projects identified during the forum. We look forward to seeing how residents bring evidence to action in their own communities!



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