

Basic Principles of
Healthy Cities:

Community Diagnosis



Healthy Cities Project (HCP) has been launched in most of the districts in Hong Kong and is expected to expand in the future. The success of HCP requires thorough and strategic planning. Community diagnosis is a useful tool to assist in this work.

What is community diagnosis?

According to WHO definition, it is “a quantitative and qualitative description of the health of citizens and the factors which influence their health. It identifies problems, proposes areas for improvement and stimulates action”.¹ The practical relevance of community diagnosis in HCP includes:

- to act as a data reference for the district
- to provide an overall picture of the local community and the residents' concerns
- to suggest priority areas for intervention and the feasible solutions
- to indicate the resource allocation and the direction of work plans
- to create opportunities for intersectoral collaboration and media involvement
- to form basis of setting indicators for HCP evaluation

How to conduct community diagnosis?

The process of community diagnosis involves four stages:

1. Initiation
2. Data collection and analysis
3. Diagnosis
4. Dissemination

1 Initiation

In order to initiate a community diagnosis project, a dedicated committee or working group should be set up to manage and coordinate the project. The committee should involve relevant parties such as government departments, health professionals and non-governmental organisations.

At an early stage, it is important to identify the available budget and resources to determine the scope of the diagnosis.¹ Some of the common areas to be studied may include health status, lifestyles, living conditions, socioeconomic conditions, physical and social infrastructure, inequalities, as well as public health services and policies.

Once the scope is defined, a working schedule to conduct the community diagnosis, production and dissemination of report should be set.

2 Data collection and analysis

The project should collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, Population Census and statistical data e.g. population size, sex and age structure, medical services, public health, social services, education, housing, public security and transportation, etc. can provide background of the district. As for the community data, it can be collected by conducting surveys through self-administered questionnaires, face to face interviews, focus groups and telephone interviews.²

In order to ensure reliability of the findings, an experienced organisation such as an academic institute can be employed for conducting the study.² The sampling method should be carefully designed and the sample size should be large enough to provide sufficient data to draw reliable conclusions. Therefore, study results derived can truly review the local community.²

Collected data can then be analysed and interpreted by experts. Here are some practical tips on data analysis and presentation:¹

- statistical information is best presented as rates or ratios for comparison
- trends and projections are useful for monitoring changes over a time period for future planning
- local district data can be compared with other districts or the whole population
- graphical presentation is preferred for easy understanding

3 Diagnosis

Diagnosis of the community is reached from conclusions drawn from the data analysis. It should preferably comprise three areas:

- health status of the community
- determinants of health in the community
- potential for healthy city development

4 Dissemination

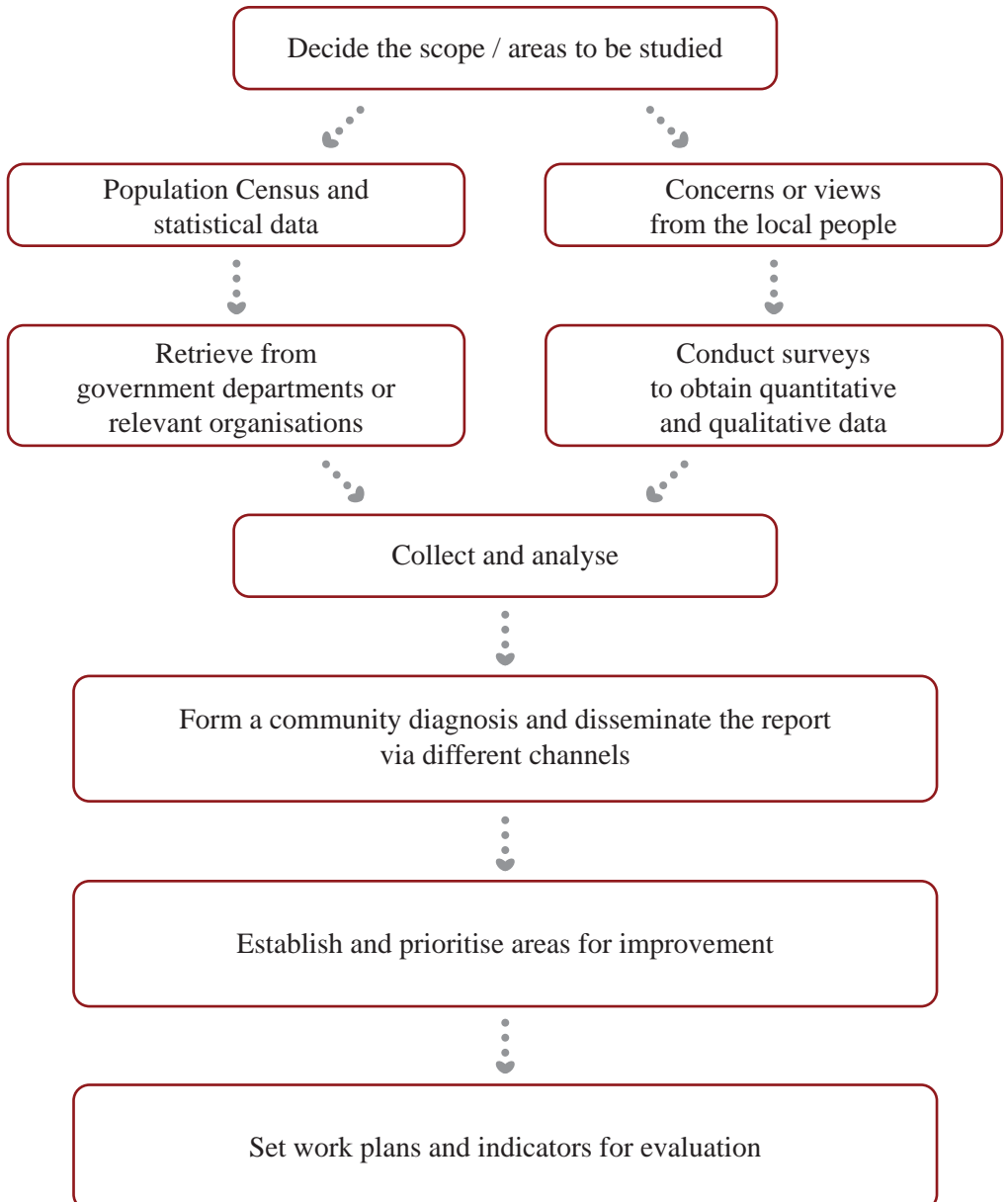
The production of the community diagnosis report is not an end in itself, efforts should be put into communication to ensure that targeted actions are taken. The target audience for the community diagnosis includes policy-makers, health professionals and the general public in the community.

The report can be disseminated through the following channels:¹

- presentations at meetings of the health boards and committees, or forums organised for voluntary organisations, local community groups and the general public
- press release
- thematic events (such as health fairs and other health promotion programmes)

It is important to realise that **Community Diagnosis** is not an one-off project, but is part of a dynamic process leading to health promotion in the community. Therefore community diagnosis should be conducted at regular intervals to allow the HCP be continuously improved.

A flowchart describing the community diagnosis process



Local examples and useful information

You may visit the following websites for some local examples of community diagnosis reports.

- Eastern District www.districtcouncils.gov.hk/east/ehc/index.html
- Tai Po www.tpshc.org/englishsite1/index.php

Moreover, statistical information related to the health of our population can be accessed at www.healthyhk.gov.hk, a website of the Department of Health.

References

1. World Health Organization. City Health Profiles: how to report on health in your city. ICP/HSIT/94/01 PB 02. Available at: www.euro.who.int/document/wa38094ci.pdf
2. Garcia P, McCarthy M. Measuring Health: A Step in the Development of City Health Profiles. EUR/ICP/HCIT 94 01/PB03. Available at: www.euro.who.int/document/WA95096GA.pdf

Copies of this leaflet are available from the Community Liaison Division. Please direct request to ha2_cld2@dh.gov.hk.

This leaflet is also accessible at the Central Health Education Unit's website www.cheu.gov.hk and Centre for Health Protection's website www.chp.gov.hk.

