

# 2015 Forces of Change Assessment Report

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LICKING COUNTY COMMUNITY HEALTH  
IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE



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## Forces of Change Assessment Summary Report

### Introduction

On November 5, 2015, the Licking County Community Health Improvement Committee (CHIC) conducted a Forces of Change (FOC) assessment. Doing so was a continuation of the use of the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) process in order to improve public health in Licking County. The FOC assessment is designed to answer the questions “What is occurring or might occur that could affect the health of our community?” and “What specific threats or opportunities are generated by these items?”

CHIC members began using the MAPP process in 2010, and the FOC assessment is one of four assessments included in the process. This is the third FOC assessment conducted by the CHIC. The first assessment was conducted in 2010, and the second was completed in 2013. The data collected as part of the assessment will be used by CHIC members to review and update the county’s Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

The assessment was facilitated by staff, from the Ohio State University’s Center for Public Health Practice (CPHP). Staff from the CPHP facilitated the 2013 FOC assessment as well. This allowed all members of the CHIC to participate in the assessment, and ensured an unbiased, third party observer presided over the assessment.

### Assessment Methodology

The assessment was conducted based on guidance information provided by the National Association of County and City Health Officials and involved the use of an affinity diagram. Assessment participants were broken into four small groups and were asked to answer “What is occurring or might occur that could affect the health of our community?” Each group recorded their ideas on large “sticky notes” (one idea per sticky note). Responses were posted on a wall and participants were then asked to group like ideas together into themes. Each thematic area was discussed, named, and determined to be a Force of Change within the community.

The participants were broken into four groups again, and each group was assigned 1-2 Forces of Change for further discussion. The groups evaluated their assigned Forces of Change based on the threats they may pose to public health and the public health system in the county, and the potential opportunities they present. Each small group reported out to the full group, and the information was recorded on a Forces of Change Threats and Opportunities Worksheet.

### Forces of Change Identified During the Assessment

CHIC members identified a total of seven Forces of Change. The seven items were selected in accordance with the methodology described in this document. The Forces of Change identified during the assessment were further analyzed by CHIC members to determine the opportunities

and threats posed by each item. The Forces of Change identified during the assessment are as follows:

- 1. Prevention and Education**
- 2. Emergency Preparedness**
- 3. Sexually Transmitted Diseases**
- 4. Family Units**
- 5. Behavioral Health Issues**
- 6. Population Growth**
- 7. Access and Affordability of Healthcare**

Each of these items present potential positive and negative effects on public health in Licking County. The committee discussed a number of topics and issues during the assessment, however these were the seven categories that were agreed on by those in attendance.

The two previous FOC assessments produced a total of six Forces of Change respectively, and the same six items were identified during both assessments. Only two of these six Forces of Change were included in the 2015 assessment. They were Population Growth and Healthcare. In the previous assessments Healthcare was specifically described as Healthcare Reform, however many of the same factors were discussed during the 2015 assessment, which is why it is included as a repeat item.

#### Prevention and Education

This Force of Change was one that was heavily debated during the assessment, and there were many threats and opportunities discussed regarding this topic. The most prominent item discussed was social media. The reasoning behind this was the amount of potentially incorrect information on social media as well as the ability to effectively communicate fact-based information to the public due to the overwhelming amount of information available. The members felt social media was both a threat and opportunity due to these circumstances. Another threat identified was the lack of time agencies have to adequately educate the public regarding issues affecting public health in the county. These issues included tobacco use, drug addiction, especially opiate addiction, risky behaviors that lead to the increase in sexually transmitted diseases, and obesity. The committee felt as though the public doesn't fully understand the severity of these issues, and the lack of time and resources available to agencies dedicated to combating these issues only compounds the problems.

The CHIC members felt as though the agencies' expertise with developing media campaigns could be an opportunity even though getting the message to their target populations can be a challenge. Providing a consistent stream of factual based information regarding the concerns listed above was viewed as an opportunity to overcome the "information overload" concerns viewed as a threat. Ultimately this was viewed as a major opportunity to increase awareness in

the county. The committee felt that even though social media was viewed as a threat, the work to address the threat must continue to better protect public health in the county.

### Emergency Preparedness

The committee identified the biggest threat related to emergency preparedness as the misbelief that an act of terror can't or won't happen in Licking County. As a result, residents place less of an emphasis on preparing for an emergency situation, which will only compound the problem should an incident occur in or near the county. Additionally, the members felt the media was responsible for inducing panic regarding issues that may not pose a significant threat to the county, which requires unnecessary resources being dedicated to deal with an issue that takes away the focus from issues of prominence in the county.

One major opportunity identified was the continuing collaboration between local agencies to promote preparedness and to develop plans to assist in raising the preparedness level in the county. Many agencies work "behind the scenes" to develop plans, conduct exercises, and improve their ability to respond to emergencies within the county. Most of the time these activities are "out of sight and out of mind" for many county residents and there is a misconception that this work is not being done. Not only is continued collaboration an opportunity, but increasing the public's knowledge of what is occurring to prepare for an emergency is also an opportunity.

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the county have continued to rise over the past 5 years, specifically Chlamydia and Gonorrhea. Licking County is not alone in dealing with this issue, but the CHIC members felt so strongly about this issue that it was identified as an FOC. (STD's are currently addressed in the county's Community Health Improvement Plan.) Major threats identified relative to this issue included intravenous drug use, drug resistant STDs, and risky behaviors that are leading to the spread of STDs.

A number of opportunities were discussed to address this issue. Most prominently discussed was the creation of satellite treatment centers. The idea behind this concept would be to make treatment and education options more easily available to individuals in need of these services. There is often a stigma associated with seeking treatment for STDs, and making treatment available discreetly would make this a more viable option. Another opportunity discussed was to have agencies partner together to advocate for the legislature to change the laws associated with the treatment of partners of individuals confirmed to have an STD. Doing so would make it easier to treat additional patients with STDs, which would be a great tool in combating this issue. The CHIC members also identified providing STD education at drug and alcohol abuse centers as an opportunity. Data indicates that individuals suffering from addiction to drugs and alcohol are more likely to make high risk decisions. This generally leads to a higher infection

rate of STDs among this population. Providing this type of education should assist in reducing the STD rates in the county.

### Family Units

A discussion regarding the positive implications of strong family units was held during the assessment. CHIC members felt as though children in a strong family unit were more likely to make well informed decisions and avoid potential public health related pitfalls such as drug or alcohol abuse, tobacco use, risky behaviors leading to STDs, and other concerns. The most discussed threats with this topic were broken families and unstable family units. This can often lead to less supervision of children, which can lead to high risk behaviors.

CHIC members felt educational opportunities for “non-traditional” families were a significant opportunity to address this concern. While many educational opportunities exist in the county for families and youth, a specific curriculum dedicated to unstable family units could potentially yield better results. The existing opportunities were said to be excellent and should continue, but additional opportunities could be developed. Another opportunity identified was the positive use of social media. While the concerns with social media have been described in this report, the committee felt as though there are plenty of positive applications for using social media to promote and protect public health. This could include coordinated efforts between CHIC members to promote consistent and positive messages. CHIC members could also promote each other’s services in order to increase the use and impact of the member agencies.

### Behavioral Health Issues

Multiple threats associated with behavioral health issues were discussed during the assessment. None were discussed more than The increase in depression and anxiety within the county and the stigma associated with these issues that often discourage individuals from seeking treatment was of primary concern. Left untreated, behavioral health issues can lead to a variety of other concerns, which were also identified as threats under this FOC. These threats include a decrease in productivity within the workforce, increased potential for violence, and an increase in substance abuse. All of these threats contribute to the concerns described with Family Units previously. They can also lead to an increase in the negative impact of addiction in the county, which can include joblessness and the inability to pass a drug screening to obtain a job.

A variety of opportunities were identified as well, the most significant was the recent approval of the Mental Health Recovery levy by county voters. Sustained funding allows existing programs to continue, and aids the development of additional opportunities. Developing opportunities focused on the prevention of behavioral health concerns was discussed, specifically the potential to embed a counselor within Children Services in order to serve these

at risk children. The positive use of social media was discussed once again regarding this topic. This is an issue that will be further discussed during upcoming CHIC meetings.

### Population Growth

The issue of population growth has been a consistent theme during past FOC assessments. The widening of State Route 161 in the western portion of the county has been the driving force behind this topic, and the new interchange being added at the Cherry Valley Road section of the highway is expected to expand development opportunities. Additionally, an Amazon distribution center is under construction in Etna Township, and this is expected to result in a high number of development opportunities. All of these items were discussed during the assessment, and CHIC members felt as though the new development was an opportunity for the county, however there were several threats identified as well. The most discussed threat was that as this development takes place in the western portion of the county, residents are more likely to associate themselves with Franklin County rather than Licking County. This could result in a loss of opportunities to better serve these residents with Licking County services. However, new development opportunities are expected in the central portion of the county, and CHIC members felt as though these opportunities could lead to a shortage in healthcare resources available to residents.

One of the opportunities identified during the assessment was the potential for medical specialists to be attracted to Licking County. This would diversify the healthcare spectrum of services available to county residents, which could lead to better public health outcomes due to the localization of specialty services. Additionally, there would be better opportunities to market the services available to residents. As more residents move to Licking County, there's an opportunity for additional media outlets and additional marketing opportunities. This could lead to increased utilization of currently underutilized resources.

### Access and Affordability of Healthcare

Access to healthcare has also been a reoccurring topic during past FOC assessments. The issue of access to healthcare has also been included as a priority in Licking County's Community Health Improvement Plans. CHIC members identified individuals' lack of understanding of their healthcare options as a threat. While some county residents may be eligible for Medicaid under the state's expansion of Medicaid services, they may not know this is the case or understand how to apply for coverage. However, some residents have access to healthcare, but they may not be able to afford the deductibles or other costs associated with their coverage. This can lead to easily preventable or treated conditions worsening into more serious illnesses that are more expensive to treat. These conditions are not only more expensive to treat, they also put more stress on the healthcare system, which can result in longer wait times for diagnosis and treatment for patients.

While these threats regarding healthcare access and coverage exist, there are also opportunities. There is an opportunity for healthcare providers and public health agencies to collaborate and provide easily accessible prevention services to county residents. Additionally, agencies could collaborate to better educate residents regarding the types of coverage they may be eligible to receive and to educate them regarding how to best utilize their coverage. This could allow residents to use prevention services and avoid costly treatments for conditions that haven't been addressed in a timely manner.

### Summary

CHIC members will review this report and the data collected as part of the FOC assessment during their next regularly scheduled meeting in February of 2016. The information will be used to determine if any changes to the CHIP are necessary. CHIC members designed the CHIP to be a living document, that is updated regularly when new data become available. This is the case with each of the MAPP assessments conducted by the CHIC, and this data will allow CHIC members to make informed decisions regarding how to best promote and protect public health in Licking County.