

PACE EH | 2020

Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health

Supported in part by the Licking County Foundation



LICKING COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

PROMOTING HEALTH WHERE YOU LIVE, WORK AND PLAY





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I. Overview

In 2019, the Licking County Health Department (LCHD) conducted a Protocol for Assessing Community Excellence in Environmental Health (PACE EH) assessment which was supported in part by the Licking County Foundation. The assessment was created by officials from the CDC and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). Conducting a PACE EH assessment allows a community to learn about Environmental Health (EH) and how it affects their daily lives. It also provides health departments the opportunity to engage the residents they serve and gather accurate primary data regarding what they feel are the most pressing EH issues where they live, work, and play. The data is then used to identify EH priorities in a community and set actionable goals to address them.

Focus Groups

LCHD used a three-pronged approach to data collection when conducting the assessment. Department staff hosted five (5) focus groups in the county to gather information and data from residents in a face-to-face manner, an online survey was distributed to county residents through multiple outreach avenues, and surveys were completed by WIC clients during their scheduled WIC appointments. The focus groups were dispersed geographically throughout the county. The goal was to provide residents in each part of the county an opportunity to participate in the assessment without having to travel a long distance. The focus group model allowed LCHD staff to personally interact with residents and gain insights to their specific EH concerns in Licking County. Each group was presented with the same questions in order to standardize the data collection as much as possible, but attendees were also encouraged to go beyond the questions and share their thoughts on any subject they wanted to address. This allowed for wide ranging discussions that covered many public health topics.



The focus groups were held at the Licking County Library – Newark location, Licking Valley Elementary School, Utica High School, Lakewood High School (in Hebron), Pataskala Police Department, and Johnstown Village Council Chambers; attendance varied at each location. The same LCHD staff attended each focus groups allowing the sessions to be conducted in a uniform manner, which assisted with reducing any variations in the implementation of the focus group strategy. Reducing variations was important in order to assist with consistent data collection. LCHD has implemented this model for other projects, and the staff followed the same proven methodology.

Online Survey

LCHD worked with multiple partners to develop a survey and distribute it through multiple avenues to county residents. Partners included in the survey design process were Denison University, Licking County Planning Commission, Licking County Recycling Department, City of Newark, Licking Township, and Licking County Soil and Water Conservation District. These entities had input on survey development and the topics that were covered. LCHD’s Epidemiologist was also included in this process to review the survey design to insure it was accurate and unbiased. Once the survey questionnaire was finalized, it was entered into the online survey application, SurveyMonkey, and the link was distributed by all partners through their channels.

Community Survey

LCHD staff distributed surveys at local businesses to gather data from members throughout the community. Staff focused on areas of the county that traditionally have high poverty rates to ensure these individuals’ voices were heard as part of the assessment. The surveys were essentially “man on the street” interviews done between LCHD staff and community members. Responses were recorded on paper surveys and data was extrapolated and evaluated.

LCHD operates the WIC program in Licking County. The program serves pregnant and breastfeeding women, women who recently had a baby, infants age birth through 12 months, and children age 1 to 5 years whose income is at 185% of the poverty level. This population was selected to ensure individuals that may experience health and income disparities were involved in the project. The goal was to make the assessment as diverse as possible and to gather data from a wide spectrum of county residents.

II. Assessment Team

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III. Results

Focus Groups

Focus group attendees were asked what they thought were the most significant EH related issues in Licking County. The most common response was housing. Individuals indicated they were concerned that safe affordable housing was scarce for many residents, especially for low income individuals. Attendees mentioned concerns with mold and other indoor air quality issues within homes in the county. Additionally, attendees felt many people in the county were not aware of the housing issues and that without awareness, the issue will not be at the forefront and will continue to be a concern.

The second most significant issue discussed was diseases caused by mosquitoes. This issue was discussed at each of the five focus groups. At the Newark focus group, concerns regarding daytime-biting mosquitoes that cause encephalitis were discussed due to the rise in Lacrosse Encephalitis numbers in the county. The Johnstown focus group discussed the need for mosquito breeding site reduction. This was also discussed at the Pataskala focus group and attendees requested that LCHD conduct an educational campaign to reduce breeding sites. LCHD did develop this messaging and distributed it via its social media platforms and through radio commercial promotion. One item of note regarding this topic is that the focus groups were held in the summer during mosquito season. While Licking County did experience an increase in Lacrosse Encephalitis in 2019, it is likely this topic was discussed prominently due to the time of year the focus groups were held.

Overall attendees felt their drinking water was safe. There was a mixture of individuals who receive their drinking water from a public source and a water well. Those who receive their water from a well were concerned about possible contamination from nearby septic systems. Confidence was expressed in the water quality by attendees that were served by public water system. They felt as though the entities operating the water treatment plants were trustworthy and did not view safe water as an issue.

Air quality was discussed and concerns for outdoor air quality were discussed. At the Newark focus group, attendees felt Licking County's air quality suffers due to our proximity to Columbus. Additionally, there were concerns regarding the number of individuals commuting to Columbus and causing additional air pollution issues. At the Johnstown focus group, concerns regarding air quality and the egg farm locations were discussed. Attendees felt as though air quality issues associated with the egg farm have improved over the past 10 years, but there are still lingering concerns with how the farm affects air quality in the area. Pataskala focus group attendees mentioned the increase in traffic related to the development of Etna Township is negatively impacting the air quality in the area. Additionally, some



attendees felt the increased traffic could hasten the impacts of global warming. Utica attendees mentioned that farming activities sometimes cause issues with air quality, but that the activities are essential to families making ends meet and providing for their families.

Attendees were asked to discuss food safety and access. The vast majority of attendees felt the level of food safety at restaurants and grocery stores was high. There were concerns expressed about food safety at festivals and outdoor events. Many attendees were unaware that LCHD staff conduct inspections at all festivals and outdoor events to ensure vendors are implementing the required food safety practices.

Reactions were mixed regarding access to healthy and safe food. Attendees at the Licking Valley focus group felt there were no issues with access to health and safe food, while those at Lakewood and Pataskala were concerned with this issue. Newark attendees felt that the farmers market at the Canal Market District provided an excellent opportunity for low income individuals to have access to healthy foods. This was mainly due to the fact that the market began accepting WIC and SNAP benefits. Attendees at each location indicated there was a need to increase the number of farmers markets in the county, which would provide additional points of access for these foods.

As stated above, concerns regarding mosquitoes were mentioned at every focus group. However, attendees were also asked about concerns with Lyme Disease. Very little concern for Lyme Disease was expressed. Licking County has experienced a significant increase in Lyme Disease cases, and even more concerning is that many of the cases were acquired in Licking County. LCHD has developed additional educational materials to better educate county residents regarding this emerging EH issue.

Online Survey

The table below covers the demographic information collected at the end of the PACE EH online survey and includes a comparison to Licking County census data to gauge survey representation in the county.

Table 1: Online Survey Response Demographics

Demographics		
Source: 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates		
TOTAL RESPONSES = 486		
AGE	PACE EH	Licking County
Minimum	21	N/A
Maximum	100	N/A
Average	52.9	39.9

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HOUSEHOLD INCOME	PACE EH	Licking County
< \$25,000	5.6%	19.4%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	14.0%	22.9%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	16.0%	18.4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	18.3%	14.5%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	23.9%	16.0%
> \$150,000	12.0%	8.8%
EDUCATION	PACE EH	Licking County
Did not graduate high school	1.0%	10.4%
High School Graduate	10.7%	35.5%
Some College	21.7%	23.7%
Graduated College	37.2%	22.8%
Some Grad School	3.1%	N/A
Grad School Graduate	26.3%	7.6%
ZIP CODE	PACE EH	Licking County
43055 - Newark	42.8%	36.2%
43023 - Granville	12.4%	7.8%
43056 – Heath	12.4%	10.8%
43062 - Pataskala	11.1%	17.0%
43031 - Johnstown	8.6%	7.5%
43025 - Hebron	2.5%	3.0%
43076 - Thornville	2.0%	5.0%
43001 - Alexandria	1.8%	1.7%
43008 - Buckeye Lake	1.5%	1.5%
43080 – Utica	1.5%	3.2%
43013 - Hartford	1.3%	0.6%
43830 - Nashport	1.0%	3.4%
<i>*Zip Codes < 1.0% were not included</i>		

The Licking County Health Department used the online survey application SurveyMonkey to collect data for the PACE EH project. A survey was developed within the system with categories built to collect data including:

1. Environmental Health in Your Neighborhood and Community
2. Housing and Transportation
3. Recreation
4. Food Safety/Access
5. Water Quality
6. Community Perceptions
7. Demographics



The quantitative data analysis of the survey results can be found below:

Table 2: Environmental Health in Your Neighborhood and Community

Environmental Health in Your Neighborhood and Community		
How much of a problem are the following in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	Trash and litter	2.13
2	Run down/poorly maintained homes	2.03
3	High weeds and grass	1.99
4	Junk cars	1.86
5	Abandoned homes/vacant properties	1.65
6	Scrap tires	1.60
7	Discarded syringes/needles	1.37
How would you rate the following in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	How likely would you be to participate in curbside recycling if offered?	4.23
2	Solid waste (trash) disposal access/options	3.69
3	How would you rate the overall cleanliness of your community?	3.57
4	Recycling availability	3.08
5	Used motor oil disposal options	2.38
6	Options for proper disposal of household hazardous waste (pesticide, spray paint, chemicals)	2.07
7	Options for proper disposal of scrap tires	1.95
How concerned are you about the following in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	High radon levels in your home	2.57
2	Getting cancer from environmental toxins	2.51
3	Mold in your home	2.35
4	Risk of carbon monoxide poisoning in your home	2.06
5	Air quality due to vehicle or industrial emissions	2.05
6	Air pollution due to open burning	1.81
7	Getting rabies due to an animal bite	1.69
8	Someone in your household getting lead poisoning from drinking water or old paint	1.63
9	Exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke in your home	1.38



How would you rate the following pest concerns in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	The number of mosquitoes present?	3.27
2	The number of ticks present in lawns and open spaces?	3.06
3	How likely are you to get Lyme Disease from a tick bite?	2.77
4	Quality of local mosquito control efforts?	2.62
5	How likely are you to get a disease from a mosquito bite? (West Nile Virus, La Crosse Encephalitis)	2.60
6	The number of homes with mice and/or rats?	2.16
7	Number of homes with bed bugs?	1.86
8	Number of homes with cockroach infestations?	1.84

Table 3: Housing and Transportation

Housing and Transportation		
How would you rate the following housing concerns in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	Access to safe housing?	3.18
2	Access to affordable housing?	2.82
3	The number of homeless individuals in your community?	2.36
4	Your risk of a fire at home?	1.98
5	Your risk of becoming homeless within the next 12 months?	1.4
How would you rate the following Development and Transportation topics in Licking County?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	How do the road conditions in Licking County impact your ability to bike safely?	3.53
2	How does your access to reliable transportation impact your health?	2.67
3	How does your access to public transportation options impact your health?	2.49
4	How does new business development in Licking County impact your health?	2.39
5	How does new housing development in Licking County impact your health?	2.19



If you are employed, how long does it take you to get to work each day?		
Rank	Option	Response Percentage
1	Under 15 minutes	33.6%
2	Under 30 minutes	18.6%
3	Under 45 minutes	9.9%
4	Under 1 hour	8.1%
5	Under 1 hour and 15 minutes	2.6%
6	Under 1 ½ hours	0%
7	More than 1 ½ hours	0%

Table 4: Recreation

Recreation		
Which of the following recreation assets in Licking County have you used/visited in the past six months?		
Rank	Option	Response Percentage
1	A community park (city, village, etc.)	70.1%
2	Walked on a bike/multi-use trail	56.9%
3	Crosswalks	53.7%
4	A county park (Licking Park District park)	48.2%
5	A playground	32.9%
6	A gym or fitness center	31.8%
7	Buckeye Lake (boating, fishing, swimming)	27.1%
8	Rode a bike on a bike/multi-use trail	26.4%
9	Blackhand Gorge Nature Preserve	25.7%
10	A dog park	13.9%
11	Other	8.9%
How important are the following items for you to lead a healthy life?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	Walking trails or sidewalks	4.05
2	Crosswalks	3.97
3	Schools	3.76
4	Parks/Playgrounds	3.68
5	Bike Trails	3.62
6	Gyms or fitness centers	3.24
7	Pet friendly areas	3.16



Table 5: Food Safety/Access

Food Safety/Access		
How often do you plan to shop at a local farmer's market during the summer?		
Rank	Option	Response Percentage
1	Once or Twice	34.6%
2	Every other week	23.7%
3	Once a month	19.1%
4	Weekly	12.8%
5	Never	9.8%
Please answer these food safety and access questions.		
Rank	Question	Weighted Average
1	How would you rate your ease of access to fresh, healthy foods?	3.85
2	Cleanliness of the grocery stores in Licking County?	3.7
3	Safety of the food served in restaurants in Licking County?	3.37
4	Cleanliness of the restaurants in Licking County?	3.28
5	Safety of the food served at festivals and fairs in Licking County?	3.14

Table 6: Water Quality

Water Quality		
How would you rate the quality and safety of drinking and surface water in Licking County?		
Rank	Topic	Weighted Average
1	Safety of drinking water from a public water system?	3.38
2	Safety of drinking water from a private well?	3.36
3	Rate the water quality in the Licking River and Licking County's other streams and lakes.	2.77
4	What is the likelihood of a household sewage (septic) system causing water pollution in streams and lakes?	2.76
5	What is the likelihood of becoming sick from swimming in a public pool in Licking County?	2.64
6	How safe is it to swim in Licking County's rivers, streams, and lakes?	2.42
7	How safe is it to eat fish from Licking County's rivers, streams, and lakes?	2.26



Open Ended Questions

A few questions were included in the online survey allowing survey respondents to provide open ended answers. Data for these answers were categorized into common “**themes**” and “**topics**” to group the most prominent answers amongst the sample. The results for each can be found below:

1. What do you like most about living in your neighborhood?

Themes: Work Life Balance, Rural/Urban, Community, Infrastructure, Amenities

Topics: Quiet, Safe, Neighbors, Country Feel, Low Traffic, Sidewalks, Proximity, Low Crime, Low Taxes, Walkability, Bike Trail, Stores, Work, Access to Highway, Homes, Schools, Affordability

2. What changes would most improve your neighborhood?

Themes: Infrastructure, Traffic, Vectors, Pollution, Housing, Amenities

Topics: Sidewalks/Road Repair, Speeding, Mosquitos, Septic systems, Recycling, Open burning, Affordable housing, Water quality, Snow removal, Parks, Bike Trails, Road access, Speed enforcement, Housing/property upkeep, Tires, Noise, Homelessness, Drugs, Free transportation

3. What changes would most improvement Licking County?

Themes: Infrastructure, Pollution, Amenities, Transportation, Housing, Vectors

Topics: Sidewalks/Road Repair, Water quality, Schools, Air pollution, Cable/Internet options, Public transportation, Affordable housing, Mosquito control, Bike paths, Housing/Property upkeep, Taxes, Homelessness, Recycling, Drugs, Tires, Traffic control, Speeding, Jobs, Mental health services

4. When thinking of the future, what environmental health concerns do we need to be prepared to address in the next 5 or 10 years?

Themes: Infrastructure, Traffic, Vectors, Pollution, Housing, Amenities

Topics: Mosquito borne illness, Drugs, Mental health, Water pollution/quality, Air quality, Tick borne diseases, Trash, Obesity, Climate change, Traffic, Septic systems, Recycling, Open burning, Over development and growth

Community Survey

The Licking County Health Department distributed the survey at various businesses and organizations throughout Licking County to collect data for the PACE EH project. A total of 176 individuals participated in the Community Survey. The survey collected data in the following categories:

1. Environmental Health in Your Neighborhood and Community
2. Housing and Transportation
3. Recreation
4. Food Safety/Access
5. Water Quality
6. Community Perceptions



Table 7: Environmental Health in Your Neighborhood and Community

Environmental Health in Your Neighborhood and Community		
What do you think is the most significant Environmental Health issue in Licking County?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Housing	39.2%
2	Water Quality	18.8%
3	Air Quality	14.8%
4	Food Safety	13.6%
5	Vectors/Mosquitoes	13.6%
How would you describe the air quality in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Good	49%
2	Very Good	28.7%
3	Neutral	17.8%
4	Not Good	2.5%
5	Not Very Good	1.9%
How would you rate trash/litter accumulation in your neighborhood?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Acceptable	39.2%
2	Slightly Acceptable	22.2%
3	Neutral	19%
4	Slightly Unacceptable	12%
5	Unacceptable	7.6%



Housing was listed as the most important EH issue, and this was a common theme in the assessment. Access to safe and affordable housing were listed as concerns in the Online Survey as well as in the Focus Groups. This is an issue that needs to be further evaluated and addressed.

Table 8: Housing

Housing		
How would you rate access to safe and healthy housing in Licking County?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Neutral	47.1%
2	Accessible	28.1%
3	Not Accessible	11.1%
4	Very Accessible	8.5%
5	Not Very Accessible	5.2%

Table 9: Recreation

Recreation		
How would you rate the accessibility of opportunities for physical activity (parks, trails, sidewalks, etc.) in Licking County?		
Rank	Option	Percentage
1	Accessible	42.6%
2	Very Accessible	34.2%
3	Neutral	17.4%
4	Not Accessible	5.2%
5	Not Very Accessible	0.6%

Licking County has many opportunities for residents to be physically active, and the survey results show that county residents feel this is a strength in the county. A lot of organizations in the county promote these opportunities and these efforts appear to be successful.



Table 10: Food Safety/Access

Food Safety/Access		
How would you rate the level of food safety at restaurants in Licking County?		
Rank	Option	Percentage
1	Safe	48.7%
2	Neutral	39.1%
3	Very Safe	5.1%
4	Not Safe	4.5%
5	Not Very Safe	2.6%
How would you rate the level of food safety at festivals/events in Licking County?		
Rank	Question	Percentage
1	Neutral	50.6%
2	Safe	33.5%
3	Not Safe	9.5%
4	Very Safe	4.4%
5	Not Very Safe	1.9%
How would you rate access to fresh healthy foods in Licking County?		
Rank	Question	Percentage
1	Accessible	57%
2	Very Accessible	21.5%
3	Neutral	19%
4	Not Accessible	2.5%
5	Not Very Accessible	0%

The survey shows that over 75% of the respondents feel that healthy foods are accessible or very accessible. This was the case with the Online Survey as well. However, individuals that participated in the Focus Groups felt this was a problem.



Table 11: Water Quality

Water Quality		
How would you rate the safety of your drinking water?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Somewhat Safe	42.4%
2	Very Safe	36.7%
3	Neither Safe nor Not Safe	11.4%
4	Somewhat Unsafe	5.7%
5	Unsafe	3.8%

Another common theme across all three data collection methods was that the vast majority of participants felt their water source was safe.

Table 12: Community Perceptions

Community Perceptions		
How effective is the wastewater (sewage) from your house treated?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Very Effective	47.4%
2	Neutral	25%
3	Somewhat Effective	23.1%
4	Ineffective	3.2%
5	Somewhat Ineffective	1.3%
How would you rate recycling options in Licking County?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Acceptable	29.1%
2	Neutral	27.2%
3	Slightly Acceptable	24.7%
4	Slightly Unacceptable	10.8%
5	Unacceptable	8.2%
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How concerned are you about getting Lyme Disease from a tick bite?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Slightly Concerned	35.7%
2	Neutral	21.4%
3	Unconcerned	20.1%
4	Slightly Unconcerned	14.3%
5	Concerned	8.4%
How concerned are you about the possible health effects of Radon?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Neutral	35.5%
2	Slightly Concerned	27.7%
3	Unconcerned	14.8%
4	Slightly Unconcerned	11%
5	Concerned	11%
How concerned are you about the health effects from secondhand smoke?		
Rank	Topic	Percentage
1	Slightly Concerned	27.7%
2	Concerned	27.7%
3	Neutral	22.6%
4	Unconcerned	12.3%
5	Slightly Unconcerned	9.7%

IV. Summary

The PACE EH assessment included responses from almost 700 county residents across three different data collection methods. LCHD made a concerted effort to include residents who were considered low income and underserved. This was done by reaching out to locations where these individuals frequent or are served. It was also done to help ensure any barriers related to computer and/or internet access were addressed, and their voices would be heard as part of the assessment.

A common theme in the assessment was that access to safe and affordable housing is the most prominent EH issue in Licking County. Safe and affordable housing has been shown to have a major impact on an individual’s overall health. This issue is being addressed by organizations in Licking County, and LCHD is involved with this effort. The data collected through this assessment will be shared with these organizations.

A surprising outcome of the assessment was the majority of respondents felt that access to healthy food was readily available. Work has been done to increase access to farmers markets and to encourage all types of stores to offer healthy food options. This work appears to have been successful, and the data collected indicates this work should continue.



Another surprising outcome was the respondents' lack of concern regarding Lyme Disease. Licking County has experienced increasing Lyme Disease rates over the past 4 years. More importantly, data shows that most of the cases are being contracted in the county and are not associated with travel. This was not the case several years ago, but the disease etiology has evolved. Additional work is needed to further educate county residents to this continually evolving issue.

Additionally, assessment participants overwhelmingly felt they have access to safe water. Water is essential to life, and its importance to an individual's health cannot be overstated. This was a welcome outcome to the assessment.

The data also shows that respondents are aware of opportunities for physical activity and taking advantage of these opportunities. Many organizations within the county promote this access, and this work has been warranted based on the results of the assessment.

Overall, the assessment exceeded expectations by including nearly 700 county residents. The data collected was done in a standardized manner, which makes it comparable and actionable. The assessment results will be shared with county residents through social media, and it will be shared with the partner organizations that assisted with developing the survey. Action items that will be initiated will be to deepen the commitment to providing additional access to safe and affordable housing, better educate residents regarding Lyme Disease, and continue to promote healthy food access options and physical activity opportunities.