

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

GHPC Articles

Georgia Health Policy Center

3-31-2017

Enhancing Platforms that Support Local Health Improvement

Georgia Health Policy Center

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/ghpc_articles

Recommended Citation

Georgia Health Policy Center, "Enhancing Platforms that Support Local Health Improvement" (2017).
GHPC Articles. 15.

https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/ghpc_articles/15

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Georgia Health Policy Center at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in GHPC Articles by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.



ENHANCING PLATFORMS THAT SUPPORT LOCAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

The number of resources available to catalyze and support community health improvement efforts is growing substantially. This includes a large number of online platforms. These platforms provide communities access to data to identify opportunities for health improvement and tools and resources to guide action towards achieving healthier communities.

The Georgia Health Policy Center at Georgia State University conducted two projects to help inform Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's strategic assessment of *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps*. First, was a scan of the national landscape of platforms that provide support, guidance, and tools to drive action to improve community health. *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* served as the anchor platform for comparison. The scan explored challenges and areas of opportunity for future enhancement and leverage. Additionally, the center interviewed users of *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* to assess the platform's influence on communities and organizational users.

The Georgia Health Policy Center established the following criteria to guide platform selection:

- Some platform elements are free and publicly available.
- Baseline resources—tools, data, and/or a structured framework—are presented in a way to drive local action.
- The platform is appropriate for multi-sector audiences interested in improving community health, regardless of their stage in the change cycle.
- Some form of customizable technical assistance¹ is tied to use of the platform.
- The platform is updated to ensure opportunities for future collaboration.

Summary findings from both components are included in this brief. These results may be useful for those looking to support community health efforts, including platform developers and funders.

¹ The scan identified a wide spectrum of technical assistance offerings. Comprehensive technical assistance was defined as support in the form of email communications, online learning, peer-learning opportunities, and face-to-face technical assistance/coaching.



FINDINGS

The majority of assessed platforms (23 of 27) offer publicly available, web-based resources. Less than one-third of platforms (8 of 27) offer a structured framework to guide the use of tools and resources, and even fewer (4 of 27) provide comprehensive technical assistance. Only *Community Tool Box* and *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* offer all four, core components.

Content

Despite the fact that there are many online platforms, only limited areas of duplication were found. The most common topic areas seen across platforms include building organizational capacity and planning (e.g., building partnerships and collaboration skills). Eight platforms offer county-level data. Less than half provide tools and resources.

Integration of Tools and Resources

Most developers struggle to present resources with a cohesive, structured framework to drive local action. Many focus on the volume of resources available without fully integrating tools in a manner that provides step-by-step guidance throughout the community change cycle.

Technical Assistance

Tools and resources are more useful when customized to the local context through tailored technical assistance. Online tools can prepare communities to begin thinking about the change process. A thought partner can also share learnings from actual practice, which is essential for effective community change.² Of the assessed platforms,

only four offered comprehensive technical assistance—email communications, online learning, peer-learning opportunities, and face-to-face technical assistance/coaching.

² Chilenski, S.M., Perkins, D.F., Olson, J. (2016). The power of a collaborative relationship between technical assistance providers and community prevention teams: A correlational and longitudinal study. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 54, 19-29.

KEY PLATFORM ELEMENTS

GENERAL ELEMENT	COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS & ROADMAPS COMPONENT
• Tools and resources	• What Works for Health
• Data	• County Health Rankings
• A structured framework, integrating available tools and resources to guide local action	• Roadmaps to Health Action Center
• Technical assistance	• Roadmaps to Health Action Center Coaching

CHALLENGES

Enhancing Usability

Platform developers are aware of the need to update platforms as user preferences change and technology advances. This is particularly true when it comes to the user experience - how users navigate these platforms and find the content they need. For example, the distinguishing features of data-focused platforms come less so from the data itself and more from its usability, as well as the ability to upload, tag, and share data. The rapid pace of technological evolution and user expectations (e.g., social media and Wiki-like sharing) make enhancements to existing platforms essential.

Measuring Impact

Universally, developers recognize the difficulty in evaluating impact. Generally, existing platform evaluation is focused on volume of users and site traffic metrics, but this does not measure community change. The question remains—are the resources provided by online platforms helpful and actionable to communities?



Effective Dissemination

As many resources are underutilized, developers are challenged getting the word out about what existing resources are available. This is partly an issue of presentation and navigability, but developers admit that limited financial support hampers marketing efforts.

27 Platforms Prioritized for In-Depth Exploration

Active Living by Design	Healthy People 2020
Blue Zones	Innovation Station
Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development	Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation
Build Healthy Places Network	Kids Count
CDC Community Health Improvement Navigator	Leading Through Health System Change
Center for Health Leadership and Practice	NeighborWorks America
Center for Sharing Public Health Services	Practical Playbook
Collective Impact Forum	Public Health Community Platform
CommonHealth Action	Public Health Data Solutions
Communities Creating Healthy Environments	ReThink Health
Communities Joined in Action	Rural Health Link
Community Commons	THRIVE
Community Indicators Consortium	Trust for America's Health
Community Toolbox	

IMPLICATIONS

There are opportunities for growth and maturation of the field of online platforms in the areas of collaboration, technological advancement, and knowledge sharing that might drive enhanced use and impact on community health improvement.

Online Platforms Impact Community Work

Interviewed users say that overall, platforms have positively influenced health transformation efforts, particularly in reframing the discussion of population health. Platform use resulted in guiding redirection of funding priorities, programmatic actions, and strategies among both organizations and community coalitions. It also influenced policy changes and fostered development of new partnerships. Online data tools, specifically, provided organizations a means of measuring success; raising local awareness about health issues, including among non-traditional health partners; and increasing funding for community benefit programs.

Data Integration is Important

Given ongoing changes in the health care environment, communities are facing an increased need for data. Online platforms are a popular and effective way for organizations to analyze and display local health-related data. Users and developers acknowledge the existing tools are widely used, but that there is still room for enhancements in the sources of data (e.g., more local, granular data is preferred); in further easing the usability of data analysis and display tools; and in integrating data to other community health improvement-related resources aimed at strategic planning and programmatic activities.

Opportunity to Connect Across Platforms

Users and developers both see opportunities to leverage resources across platforms. Intentionally building connections among complementary



platforms will connect users to the best elements of each platform and could drive an acceleration of health improvement goals. Data sharing is a natural leverage point. On the flip side, it would be a natural fit for data-focused platforms to link to platforms offering evidence-based strategies that drive action. Users in local communities will benefit from increased clarity about the availability of tools and resources and developers will benefit from enhanced dissemination opportunities.

Usability and New Features Drive Adoption

The rapid pace of technological evolution and shifting user expectations will drive future platform enhancements. Platform developers agree with the need to improve the user experience through video, less dense presentation of information, and a way to navigate back to an entry point without getting lost in the details.

Positioning Platforms to Drive Local Health Transformation

Platforms for enhancing community health have seen tremendous opportunities as a result of technological advancements and broader forces creating an eager audience. The field could benefit from increased cross-promotion of complementary resources, greater collaboration, and knowledge sharing. An increased focus on alignment could drive users towards greater awareness of available resources, improved user-interface, and ultimately, greater achievement of health improvement goals.

GEORGIA HEALTH POLICY CENTER

Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

55 Park Place NE, 8th Floor • Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.413.0314

ghpc.gsu.edu