

Community Voices on the Health of Our City

Brought to you by:
Lincoln's Health Equity Coalition



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Lincoln's Health Equity Coalition is a project of Well Connected Communities (WCC). Well Connected Communities is a national health and well-being initiative of the Cooperative Extension System—in partnership with National 4-H Council and support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)—that is working to ensure that life-long health and well-being are within everyone's reach.

**Visit the Health Equity Coalition's website:
<https://lancaster.unl.edu/wellconnectedcommunities>**

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Health Equity Coalition

The Health Equity Coalition was created to increase intentional, focused and collaborative action to reduce and eliminate health disparities in Lincoln, Nebraska. The community of Lincoln experiences up to 20 years difference in life expectancy between neighborhoods in addition to several compounding health disparities between city regions. By collaborating and leveraging individual and organizational strengths, these health disparities can be eliminated. Improved length and quality of life can be within every Lincoln residents' reach. Lincoln's Health Equity Coalition is working to make this vision of health equity for all Lincoln residents a reality.



Health Equity Coalition Values:

- Health is a human right.
- We believe in abundance: there are enough resources for all to be healthy
- We believe it takes us all: all voices matter and we accept shared responsibility & accountability
- We believe in "both and"
- We recognize and uphold the inherent worth of all people
- We will do this work with humility, empathy, listening, inclusivity, and a focus on strengths.



Which health inequities matter most to Lincoln residents? A qualitative review.

Lincoln's Health Equity Coalition determined that the voices of community members needed to be sought and listened to so that health equity could be understood from their perspectives. Quantitative data on health disparities between neighborhoods in Lincoln is robust thanks to census tract-level data collection and mapping organized and sponsored by Lincoln's Community Health Endowment. The data collection and mapping is completed in collaboration between organizations, health departments, clinics, epidemiologists, map-makers and more.

The Coalition wanted more than statistics and data points; they wanted to hear from those who experience health inequities on what matters most. These community voices provide a pathway for the Health Equity Coalition and the whole community to take action to address those health inequities.



Nebraska Extension | Well Connected Communities

To hear the voice of the community on health equity in Lincoln, stakeholders and community members were recruited to participate in focus groups. The focus groups provided a sample of perspectives from two categories of participants: those who have experienced health disparities personally and those who work in social service agencies, non-profits, educational institutions, clinics and the like who serve individuals and families that experience health disparities.

Recruitment occurred via fliers, social media, and personal requests from Health Equity Coalition members. There were a total of 92 participants (six focus groups held with community members [n=59] and three focus groups with stakeholders [n=33]). Most groups were conducted via Zoom, with two community groups held in person: individuals who are or were recently unhoused and Karen individuals (immigrants from Burma). Two focus group were conducted with translators in Spanish and Karen languages. Participants' average age was 43, ranging from 19 to 80 years. The majority of participants had some college education (34%) or a bachelor's degree (38%). The racial and ethnic demographics of participants are displayed in Figure 1 below.

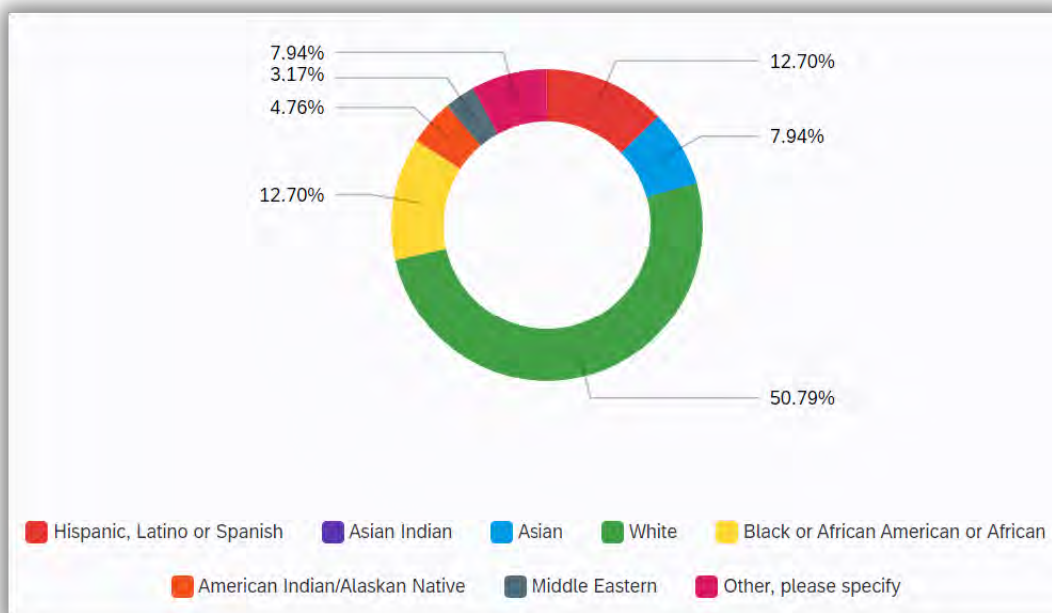


Figure 1: Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Focus Group Participants

Nebraska Extension | Well Connected Communities

Nine questions were asked to focus group participants to assess health equity in Lincoln. Participants were asked to describe a healthy lifestyle and a healthy community. Then they were asked to describe barriers and challenges to living a healthy lifestyle, including discussion of pre-pandemic, COVID-19-specific and current challenges. Participants were then asked to describe opportunities available to the community to address those barriers and challenges, along with what would most improve the quality of life for the entire community. Lastly, participants were asked what they, personally, could do to most impact the health of the community.

The focus group results underwent thematic analysis by three independent researchers. The themes that emerged from the focus groups are included in Figures 2 and 3. While there were slight differences in the order of importance and theme details between the community and stakeholder groups, five main themes emerged:

1. Balanced healthy lifestyles
2. Medical care access
3. Transportation
4. Access to education, information & resources
5. Creating healthier communities & neighborhoods



Figure 2: Focus Group Themes from Community Groups



Figure 3: Focus Group Themes from Stakeholder Groups

Healthy Lifestyles: Finding a Balance



What does it mean to live a healthy lifestyle? Focus group participants were asked this question. Defining health allows for deliberate action in the areas that mean the most to community members. Participants' responses highlighted a balance between elements of health: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Participants understood that health has many factors that are valuable and worth building in a community. Health impacts the whole person, their whole life, and our whole community.

I would say, to begin with, body, mind and soul. If we have all of those three going together, it seems, it's a magic balance in people. If you can achieve that healthy balance of body, mind and soul and balance that into your daily living then you're gonna do really well.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Participants expressed that health is a choice for oneself and something to build in one's family. They also clearly understood that a community provides access to health and can significantly impact individual and family health based on the level and equity of that access.

I think it's everything that everybody has mentioned before...having it as a whole together. Having access to the healthy foods, having access to mental health like, you know, when you're not feeling well - to have access to call a doctor or a clinic, but then also at the same time overall healthy lifestyle is...just living life without pain - physical or mental.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Healthy Lifestyles: Finding a Balance

Health = Healthy Food, Physical Activity & Medical Access

Making the right choices for yourself. Deciding what's right to put in your body, not eating so much fast food not smoking and drinking excessively.
-Community Focus Group Participant

Well, eating nutrient dense food instead of like the junk food section and trying to have home fresh meals or with fresh food, but also not eating so much that you overeat because obesity is an issue...
-Community Focus Group Participant

For me, it also means being able to get test strips for glucose testing since I am diabetic.
-Community Focus Group Participant

Having access to healthy food, a health provider, mental health services without worry.
-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Access to healthy food. Yes, stores close by have a good variety of fresh food, organic and also reasonably priced. Sometimes, unfortunately, the unhealthy and fast foods are more expensive or cheaper than the healthy, good food.
-Community Focus Group Participant

I think for instance, like exercise is a good thing...eating good, healthy foods, drinking a lot of water just getting outside and enjoying the nice weather.
-Community Focus Group Participant



Healthy Lifestyles: Finding a Balance

Health = Healthy Relationships, Mental Health, & Self-Care

Yeah, and I think also, if we provide mental health service like in schools, in agencies and in the community that will reduce all these, you know, major concerns about our healthy style of life.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Mental health is a big one.... you have to regroup... just gather your thoughts, have time to yourself to think, to take care of yourself mentally.

-Community Focus Group Participant

We always have stress in life and we need to have a way to release that...religious/spiritual groups can help us with that. The more stress we can release and reduce, the better for our body and our mental health.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Social connectedness and spiritual well-being are also a big part of [health].

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Some of our [clients] are not associated with any church when they come to us and they need that camaraderie with other people in a faith-based situation...So we do encourage them...and then when they feel comfortable in that area I think a lot of things just change for them.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I think spending time with people, with family, with loved ones. It's exposed you to like, you know, you're sharing things together. You know you're not alone and you know you encourage one another

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Healthy Lifestyles: Finding a Balance

Health = Healthy Relationships, Mental Health, & Housing

Well, [laughs], having a place to live...buying food that you need to have a balanced diet. That's the #1 thing on the street. Here, you know, they have to give enough calories to people that live on the street. I have a car, so, I don't need that many calories. I'm a Type II Diabetic...just on the, you know, edge of it. I don't drink. I don't use drugs....I would like to have a place to call home. That's how I feel.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I live in an area that's high rental and, like to the north of me it is 97% rental, and the apartment buildings do not pass health code. They're pretty disgusting...[we] see these families [with] a lot of allergens, mold issues that aren't getting addressed.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I feel like healthy is also putting your health first because I know if I put my kids...first or if I put my work first, I might skip that annual physical or...health screening or eating healthier, exercising... if I don't put my health first, I won't be able to be there for the things that are important to me.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I really focus on that taking care of myself first and if not, I can[not] take care of others around me. It's like if mama is well, the kids are going to be well. If the teacher is well, the kids are going to be well... so, for me, being healthy is being able to take care of yourself, so that way you can really give what you want to give to others.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Healthy Lifestyles: Finding a Balance

Health = Healthy Relationships

I think moving towards a healthy acceptance of one another is really important, and because in order to have conversations about health care and approaches to health care, we have to be able to have that dialogue and they have to respect the fact...that we respect them enough that we are listening.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

A healthy community to me is like responsiveness to certain things that are going around in the community. It's a positive culture where everybody is being engaged and wants to make a difference

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Also, a balanced work-home life. When parents are able to have recreation/play time with their children regularly.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Medical Care Access

High quality medical care and access to medical care are clear indicators of health - according to focus group participants in both the community and stakeholder groups. When asked to define 'health' and 'healthy lifestyle', access to medical care and insurance were consistently voiced. Focus group participants in the community-based groups described more than an assumed lack of access to medical care, they described several layers of discrimination that occurred when accessing medical care.

The discrimination described by participants can be summarized into four main categories:

1. Racial and ethnic discrimination
2. Socioeconomic discrimination
3. Discrimination against single parents
4. COVID-19 policy-related discrimination

"Education, educating the people that are providing [healthcare]."

-Community Focus Group Participant



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"...I've had experiences with doctors or medical personnel that many times assume that I don't have any insurance and want to explain me to do this or that. There is this idea of the darker your skin, the thicker it is... Another thing that has happened is that my wife is white, so many times when there are things with the kids, it is best if she goes because the doctors will treat them better than if I go with the kids."

-Community Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Healthcare

Among focus group participants there seemed to be a level of surprise, even among people of color, at how much racism and ethnic discrimination exists still. The education for this racism is falling on parents of children who are experiencing the racism. Community-level data clearly indicates health inequities exist between different racial and ethnic groups in the United States and in Lincoln. Lincoln's Health Equity Coalition calls to action everyone in healthcare, community agencies, schools and all community members to take on the role of spreading acceptance and anti-discrimination in our community.

One thing I didn't realize is how much there still is systemic racism and, like, being Latina and stuff like that, I understood that racism has still always been here. It's not something that's magically gone away.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Given that I'm black, so my daughter is biracial so she's half white, half black and some people might call her, you know, another name...I'm trying to teach her that that's not right. You know what I'm saying? Because the fact is that we don't have enough people that actually talk about racism in school. And I think that they need to accommodate that more.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Medical Care Access

Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Healthcare

Many of the deaths or serious cases in hospitalizations are people of color, which is seen as a reflection of the deficiencies in the health system. Hispanics and Latinos are 1.7 times more likely to contract COVID-19 than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, as well as 4.1 times more likely to be hospitalized from COVID-19 and 2.8 times more likely to die from COVID-19. Why? Why are we almost three times more likely to die? It really bothers me. Quite frankly, it scares me.

-Community Focus Group Participant



There are some times where medical providers or mental health providers or any type of providers may be causing harm to certain communities because they are not culturally competent in how they provide care.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

There are many factors that have been making it hard for us as a Latinx community to have access to health care or to have access to vaccinations... undocumented people will not have access... even if we get the access...do we trust it or not? I got my vaccine like last week and it was good... [Latinx] are suffering from [COVID] and there's no extra effort so far today. Are there people that maybe speak Spanish there giving their vaccines? Is there information in Spanish?...or campaigns to access at all this population?

-Community Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in Healthcare

I have first-hand seen doctors use, you know, not use person-first language and call them an addict to their face. And I've seen them make an assumption that they're coming in because they want pain pills, they want drugs and not taking their physical health concern seriously. I've seen this turn people off from even wanting to go to the doctor because when you go and you feel shamed and you feel talked down to, why would you want to go back again? So I've seen people really let their physical health go because of that fear and that shame.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Communication is very important. A lot of Anglos have the 'horse blinder' attitude towards other cultures.

-Community Focus Group Participant

So our focus is definitely black infant and maternal mortality and morbidity rates, so, for us, health care access is education. [Patients] knowing what their options are so they can make informed decisions and also safe and culturally competent health care - that is the biggest piece of what we're working on to provide to our clients because it's a huge barrier...almost every mom that we have served so far in the program - they do not feel safe or heard in the spaces that they are going into. We would not be in the middle of a black maternal health crisis in this nation if there wasn't an issue within provider groups and nurses and lactation consultants and things like that. There are some phenomenal ones here in Lincoln, yes, but we would not have the disparities and inequities we do, if there wasn't a problem.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I know our blood pressure and diabetes education is not getting to everyone.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

Socioeconomic-related Discrimination

Healthcare access = Knowing how to get the healthcare you need, when you need it, where you need it, and being able to afford it.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I've noticed that now with the expansion of Medicaid people are having difficulties getting into a provider of their choice and I think that's been going on even before the expansion happened but a lot of people are relegated to places that are maybe a little less personal, maybe aren't able to take as much time...I'm concerned about that because there are so many providers that just are not accepting Medicaid - dentists and health providers and mental health providers.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I've been on both ends of the spectrum. I've had private insurance and now, you know, and then I've had Medicaid...my experience has been night and day between when I've gone with private insurance versus Medicaid. I feel that the quality of care of the places that I've gone, or that I've taken my kids - it is not the same.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Yeah, and I worked at a dental office before, and I know that with the Medicaid they don't pay the dentist as much as the private insurance, right? Right. That's why they try to cut off a lot of things that you should have.

-Community Focus Group Participant

How can we get providers excited about working with our families?

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

Socioeconomic-related Discrimination

To be healthy is to have access to insurance, but here it is very complicated to get it or very expensive...We don't know what is best, to save the money or to spend it on this insurance.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Yeah, I've met people that do that. It's like they don't have health insurance, they don't have the money to go to urgent care, so they're forced to go to the ER because they know they can't be denied service.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Well, it's just way too gosh, darn expensive for one. And you know one of the main reasons why I'm a para...You know, it makes like \$18,000 a year... so it really doesn't make a lot of money, but I stay there because of the insurance that I get. You know, makes it worth it...and it's still expensive.

-Community Focus Group Participant

But a lot of parents don't understand the system and how to navigate it - to know, "OK. I get told 'no' a lot", so if I'm gonna call one provider and they're immediately gonna go, "Nope we don't accept you." I'm not going to want to call [other providers] because I don't want that same negative reaction put on me. Getting them into somewhere once they're accepted... that's the first big step - getting them in. Then they have to get comfortable with whomever [is providing] their care.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I [got] like this medicine and I don't have insurance. So, I paid like more for the medicine than I did for the appointment.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Medical Care Access

Socioeconomic-related Discrimination

Focus Group participants, especially those who are or were recently unhoused, expressed healthcare solutions that are successful such as free eye exams and free dental exams. However, major gaps in preventative care for individuals who are unhoused were uncovered in the focus groups, including preventative care services that are free under most health insurance programs. How can we learn from successes of eye care and dental care and provide similar services for medical care?



The biggest issue, in my personal opinion, is the health issue for homeless people. It is A, #1. I mean, they have wonderful programs here, but you can't go and get a mammogram, you can't get a blood test, physical...you know. But there are things you can do. You can go to a dentist once a year. You can get an eye exam. You can go to 17th street to get help. You could. And those are all wonderful programs. You know, cause I've used them. But without getting a full physical, or blood test to know what goes on within your body...it's like, you don't know what's going on. You don't know you've got diabetes, you don't know you've got something wrong with your thyroid - things of that nature.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

COVID-19 Related Discrimination

One time [during COVID] I took both my children to see the doctor and I wanted my mom to go with me because I cannot take care of both the kids at the same time. But they did not let my mom in because she's not the patient...so I couldn't go.

Another time...my daughter was sick, but they did not let my son in, my son is only 2 years old, and I cannot leave my son in the car. So, even though I explained to them that my son is too young and I'm a single mom, they still told me, "Find someone to go with you." I don't have any family in Lincoln so I had to cancel the appointment. So that's a huge one, especially if you're a single parent with not a huge support system in the community. Then it's like, what do you do?

-Community Focus Group Participant

Before COVID, they had a physician that came to the house and just checked up on them, updating their blood pressure and blood sugar and all of those things. And then they will just let them know when their blood is high or low. It's just getting connected to them, but now it's not a lot of home visiting because of the COVID.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Medical Care Access

Access to Specific Healthcare Services

Tele Health is amazing. I don't have to take off work if I can schedule it right before my shift or after.

-Community Focus Group Participant

But, yes, another thing was access to Tele Health. Not everybody has a smartphone with internet or reliable internet or a computer or fast enough internet to do a Tele Health visit.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Another thing that would be very beneficial to the community... if [clinics] would have longer hours. I mean in a perfect world 24/7, but longer hours ...for their services...with their own pharmacies inside the clinic and also mental health services like it's a one stop shop...we could have more of those.

-Community Focus Group Participant

[Doctor's offices] had to expand, you know, their practices a lot of places, it went as far as opening up on the weekends. It's horrible to say it like it, kind of; the Pandemic kind of awoke everybody...like, "Hey, people need these things."

-Community Focus Group Participant

I've noticed there's been a lot of people that come into the hospital because they're diabetic. They don't have enough and or resources on those types of things, so I think if Lincoln would work better on medical resources. It'd be beneficial.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Clinic with a heart is incredibly important and it would be really great if we could have more organizations like that that can help people on a more regular basis because I can't say enough about that organization.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

Access to Specific Healthcare Services

I think we need to address mental health and preventive mental health and trauma. And this comes from my work [experience]...and also knowing about epigenetics and the brain and how we transfer our traumas for generations. I think we need to address trauma and mental health...get more into the preventive side of it...I think mental health and trauma need to be addressed as a priority.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Trying to find a mental health provider who speaks Spanish is like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Mental health service is horrific, it's horrific, I mean,...we need something for people who are in such desperately, seriously bad dangerous situations. They're at the mission, they're living under bridges...It's really, it's scary to me and sad that we don't do better as a society and as a city for people that are really struggling with mental health issues.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

We have been working really hard at coming up with ways to normalize those talks about mental health and discussions about depression and anxiety and suicide...the more people talk about it the less the stigma...I can talk about my high blood pressure and really my depression isn't any different.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

And like some places, you're not necessarily going to get the best therapist even with those sliding scales....Luckily, like [community agency] right now has a program that...you can get in with a UNL student... and it actually has been helping. And he's helping me find other therapists in the community that I might actually be able to trust when this is over.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Medical Care Access

Access to Specific Healthcare Services

Focus group participants shared innovations and lessons to be learned from what is working well in providing healthcare access to specific groups, including cultural groups and individuals with disabilities. In addition, they raised the need for and roll of employers in supporting preventative care in our community.

Also, who gets it? Because I know I have a kid with a disability like Spina Bifida and if he ages out of the system - he has to get healthcare to live. And so it's just making sure that the people who need it, especially to survive, get it. But it would be nice if everyone could have health care access.

-Community Focus Group Participant

It's just the hassle to get it off with our employer, sometimes employers aren't friendly taking time off. And so you may have the insurance and all that, but if you don't have time to take off for just a luxury doctor's appointment of a physical it may be put to the backburner constantly.

-Community Focus Group Participant

We usually visit our clients at home which, for myself, has a benefit for my community. It gives more easy access. We have a health worker and also a nurse together that visit the patient so they do not have to go find a physician. So at their home we get to check blood pressure, blood sugar, after that we impart the information to their provider. We can also get what we need to refill insulin and needles. For me it is easier to connect and have the access.

As for us, we understand our culture and our community and they can tell us and we can tell the nurse and the nurse can tell the provider.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Transportation



Transportation struggles are well-known by anyone who has experience commuting in Lincoln without personal transportation. The lack of timely, predictable and efficient public transportation presents a barrier to many in their access to health, including transportation to and from work.

Innovations in public transportation were suggested by participants, and a member of the Health Equity Coalition added that,

"Innovation in public transportation would be great, but there is also a lot that can be done to improve the current public transportation structure."

-Lincoln Health Equity Coalition Member

Public transportation is a wicked issue. It will take advocates, policy makers, donors, private industry and community members to address it. How can you help restructure public transportation in Lincoln so those without public transportation can better access health?

If you could have like a program – this is like my dream goal when I hit the jackpot – having...an Uber Fund...and if you don't have transportation, there's like a voucher for you to make it to the doctor so you're not struggling with multiple kids on the bus trying to get to the doctor...so having like a fund for people to access the doctor more easily.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Transportation

With buses, a couple years ago...my family had to ride the bus all the time and you had to be on it...you had to know your schedule, you had to know everything and one little mistake, you were walking or you were possibly trying to find a new way to get home. There's also that chance...you're at your appointment two hours early and it's kind of embarrassing in a doctor's office [to] be there two hours early. You kind of get treated like you don't know what time you're supposed to be there.

-Community Focus Group Participant

The other thing with transportation and the bus system is if you have a disability, they do have the handicapped vans, but you have to like call in the morning and wait and wait just to schedule the appointment and if it's like every recurring appointment I've seen, people like sit on the phone for hours just to schedule a routine ride that they normally take every day. And there's no way to do it online you have to be on the phone.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I just thought of bike riding and like we don't have very good sidewalks for bike riding. It's not safe. I take my entire family bike riding with the littles then I'm just like, "Guys get to this side."

-Community Focus Group Participant

I know they have like the bike trails and stuff like that and even in the downtown area they have places for biking. I wish, besides down town, [the community] is much more accessible to like bike around and stuff like that.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Right now, one in the [culture group] is in BikeLNK – electrical. We want to do a training...to learn using those to get more transportation.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Transportation

Mostly for their [cultural group] transportation they never use public transportation because they are afraid or worried they will get lost. So mostly they will ask neighbors or friends to take them to the hospital or grocery. They have their own car so they ask to take them. For their health to go to see a doctor's office, they will ask their friends or neighbors to take them or they walk. They don't really ever take [public] transportation.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Transportation is an issue in our community, I believe, and so having all [health] access within one agency - being able to go from receiving your mental health services to getting your other needs met all in one place...that aids the harm reduction. It enhances people actually obtaining the services.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

With transportation...the buses are free and that's amazing for folks, but...the bus schedule doesn't meet the needs for like a job...so that alone has knocked people out of an opportunity for employment because they just were not able to get there.

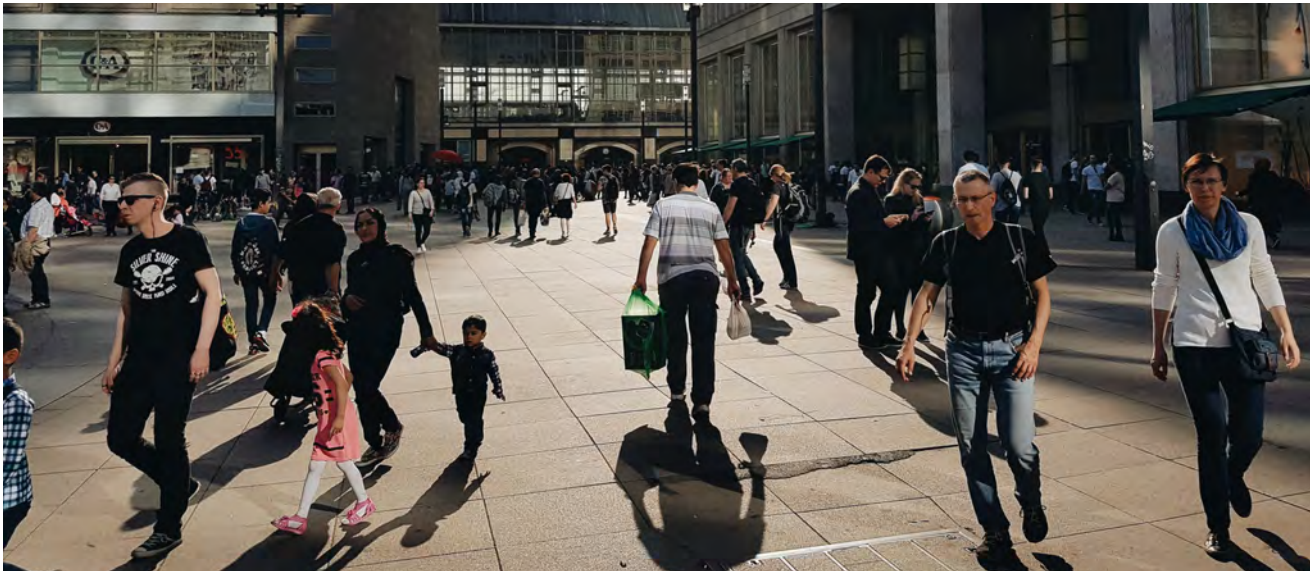
-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

[Transportation is] not always the most convenient for the individuals that we work with, you have to sometimes make several stops and what for us in a car would be 15 minutes might take them an hour to an hour and a half.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant



Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods



Focus group participants expressed the need to collectively address health and work together to build healthier communities and neighborhoods. When asked what they, as community members, could do to increase the health of our community many of them discussed the importance of connecting with and accepting each other, being neighborly, and working to build healthy families. Some participants even mentioned that just asking for their voices and input is important in building a healthier community.

“ I really do appreciate the opportunity to be part of this, and I think that this is part of [a healthy community] - is these types of opportunities to be able to...contribute and share and show that we are invested too...business owners or just the community as a complete whole. I just feel like not everybody is as invested as they could be to make changes when it comes to, you know, health care, early childhood education and care, for example, making things more equal across the board. -Community Focus Group Participant



Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods

Building Healthy Communities

So I think that there's not only one factor for community health, I believe that it's interrelated. It's like a web of factors that makes a community very healthy and it's about safety. It's about playground. It's about education. I mean, there's so many factors in my opinion that all contribute to a healthy community.

-Community Focus Group Participant

If we showed more empathy to our neighbors and more respect to the community individually, everybody would come together and it would be more of an open arms type of thing. When you're at the store in the line, you can acknowledge the people beside you because you don't know what other people are going through...just understanding that everybody has a different view on things and there's no right or wrong - that will bring a community together. It starts with you as a person.

-Community Focus Group Participant

To me a healthy community is to first start at home, ourselves, then our kids, teaching them the values so their generation gives the best for their neighbors and everyone. They will demonstrate their values outside the home and create a healthy community.

-Community Focus Group Participant

...when we all work together we make stronger things.

-Community Focus Group Participant

A healthy community is diverse - ethnically, income, education levels - where everyone has a voice and advocacy is for everyone not just sectors of the community. Equal access to healthy lifestyle-food, housing, environment...

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods

Connection & Neighborliness

Do you have a role in building a healthier community?

Yes, of course...We connect with one another, socializing with each other, supporting one another, encouraging and always visiting people.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Our culture... you don't have to knock on the door you just go in and eat or socialize together...Now that we have come here, we stay very close and then we stay by each other and...[we] call first before you go instead of knock so it kind of changed a little bit.

-Community Focus Group Participant



We're from different [refugee] camps but...that person is a [cultural group] so we try to reach out to them... We help with going to physician, going to grocery store...

-Community Focus Group Participant

...be friendly, communicate and socialize because if you're alone you are going to be depressed and have no friends...

-Community Focus Group Participant

I love the community here, very helpful people here. I love them...I think it's very important for community, the communication and the love between neighbors, the love between friends. You know,...like when you go for a walk...if they ask, "How do you do?", "Are you OK?", "Do you need something?"...love that.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods

Volunteer and Give Back to the Community

We need to do it from the community. [If] we're waiting for what else can happen...it would take forever. We need to start moving...What can you do on your own...? But what can you do as a community, with the community? ...by yourself you will just get tired. There are many ways we can contribute.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I constantly work with the schools [as a volunteer providing education]. I have a couple of workshops in every elementary [school]. For example, we worked with Parks and Rec to create...classes for the summer. So the parents can have a safe place for their kids to do something... instead of being on the computer or in the street, they can like be learning...And we work together.

-Community Focus Group Participant

To make the whole community healthier we all have to work together. The environment has to be clean, everybody has to support and help each other and understand each other.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Volunteer where possible.

-Community Focus Group Participant

There's this socialization between people and groups...that's where people feel they can come together and can work towards improving areas...being connected with each other may be really critical to improving the health of the people in the community.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

[We] rely on each other, even when we are a stranger, we still try to connect with one another...asking for help.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods

Food Access



I think we have a huge issue with affordability of healthy foods...its kind of a luxury in the same way that access to mental health is kind of a luxury for certain demographics.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

The Fresh Truck...would be there once a week... and it was so nice to get it often. She'd get to pick her produce once a week...Foodnets are nice and all, like, whenever we've been down on our finances, but there's a good risk of food spoilage quickly. Versus the Fresh Truck is like, "We care about the community. We care about those in need. Let's give them some fresh food, say, invest in their health."

-Community Focus Group Participant

The little pantries that have been popping up in the parks and in the neighborhoods, I mean, that's also a good idea. And maybe get a group of neighbors together and say, 'hey let's put up one of these little pantries and keep stock', you know, that also helps.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I think more farmers markets instead of fast food on every corner.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods

Environmental Health & Safety

The community should also be clean. I feel you want to be outside more when everybody's respecting their environment and their surroundings, keeping up on, you know, litter - for uncomfortable things you don't want, you know, your children out engaging in within the neighborhood, that you feel like they may get hurt in.

-Community Focus Group Participant

And also there's more parks, you know for people to go there and hang out instead of just stay home. So let's try to encourage people to go out and do more physical activities.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I think the community should be safe. You know, the people that live there feel safe - so if we can control the crime...

-Community Focus Group Participant

Community health is connected to mental health because if you have a good community you sleep at night and relax. You forgot the door open...no stressing, you know your community... You leave your children, if they are up in 15 or 16...at home. Mentally, you're not thinking, "Oh, they are in danger."

-Community Focus Group Participant

Followers of some other beliefs...want to freely practice their religious beliefs, but they have some concerns. So this is another part of [a] healthy community. You should be free from any concern...your beliefs always should be safe.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Creating Healthier Communities & Neighborhoods

Environmental Health & Safety

A healthy community would be feeling safe to go on a walk for either mental health or physical health. To be able to let your kids play on the backyard without having to worry about them. -Community Focus Group Participant

Affordable housing has been a big one for folks ... housing that's clean and kept-up. So many of the folks that I have worked with [say], "Please, I just don't want to be in this area...where there's...substance use...crime." -Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Getting to know your neighbors is important for safety and taking care of your fellow humans. You never know when someone will need... assistance.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I think it's important that people feel safe where they are...I think that...priority [is] more important than healthy food or anything else - they have to feel safe. -Stakeholder Focus Group Participant



Access to Education, Information & Resources



Resource sharing was a common opportunity mentioned by focus group participants. There are numerous resources, non-profits and services in Lincoln, but they seem to be well-kept secrets. Most people need more than one service to live their healthiest life. How can we make sure everyone knows about resources when they need them? How can we increase access to multiple services so people can achieve whole-health - a balance of body, mind and soul? How can we increase access to education in general - and health education specifically?

“

People...have issues accessing the 'good life' because they lack education. They don't know about the bad side of the unhealthy community. They don't get a good job. They don't have money so they can expand on their health, so they can expand their food needs. And all this combined together may [cause] like some mental issues and even broken families because of those things. So I feel like everyone needs to get educated and get a good job and [then they] can have access to knowledge about healthy lifestyles and have money to adopt the knowledge in his own life.

”

-Community Focus Group Participant

Access to Education, Information & Resources

Access to Education

She is just thankful for the [culture center]. While we are going through a difficult time the [culture center] had not left them and was trying to connect with them and she thought it was very helpful and it made her happy.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I was taking Community College classes but those also closed. I would like to have access to that again.

-Community Focus Group Participant

They need to retrain people how to work or something out there, including coding for computers, you know. Because there are more people coming into the food line as well as becoming homeless. Inflation and beyond, I don't know how anybody affords living, renting, anything on minimum wage.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Access to Education, Information & Resources

Access to Information about Health

People don't understand how important your health is. You know, I have talked to a lot of people and...they think they're doing OK, but are actually not OK. But it's so hard to change their mind. So I think we should have a better way to express that to make people understand more about [health].

-Community Focus Group Participant



I always believe in every area in your life, knowledge is power because we talk about being healthy and trying to do healthy stuff...but what's the context of that. We know that we're supposed to be eating healthy and we're supposed to be drinking water and we know we're supposed to be getting enough sleep. But how do we do that? So for me, knowledge is power.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Education on a wider level...I know the importance of a nutritious diet and...of preventative healthcare, but so many of the people that we work with don't... if they don't understand the reasons why there's never going to be that shift.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Education is so very important...they haven't gotten the education from their homes to know how to put a meal on the table.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Access to information...and ideas on how to live a healthy lifestyle and make it...everybody has different times of day or different strains on their time. Having that information available and lots of options would be like having a healthy community.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Access to Education, Information & Resources

Access to Information about Health & Resources

We also have community health workers at [culture center], but it is really our breastfeeding educators and our doulas that are those trusted voices. We've seen this model of care work across the nation in so many ways - of that community-based organization that provides the resources that are bridging the gap between, you know, the medical community and the actual community members... and they are the trusted voices because they are their neighbors and their friends...it's the people that they know and trust and they have a family member or so and so knows. It's all about word of mouth...We do a lot of patient advocacy and attend doctors appointments as well with our clients.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Share resources...I talk to people often and I'm always waiting for somebody to say they need help with something and I'm like, "Oh, I know a spot. I know a place. I got a number"...try to help rather than judge.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I was standing in line for a meal and...people come up to me and they're saying they have something wrong...I said, did you go to legal aid? [person's response], "No, cause I didn't know about it."

-Community Focus Group Participant

A big piece is advocacy...connecting families to an advocate of some sort that can kind of follow them through. Sometimes you don't know what you don't know. So it's kind of hard to know what questions to ask.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Access to Education, Information & Resources

Sharing Resources

Well, I believe that there really are a lot of wonderful resources right here Lincoln. I mean, they are available...It's the logistics of maybe accessing these resources.

-Community Focus Group Participant

There are a lot of resources in Lincoln and there's a lot of people who are working really hard to improve the resources that we already have, but just making sure that we are reaching out, like, from one agency to another and getting [people]...to those resources.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I'm the one that watches month after month after they fail not to access what they really need...I think we do have... wonderful things. But it just doesn't feel like enough.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

The information exists, but it doesn't get to the community. Sometimes it's even like really confusing.

-Community Focus Group Participant

MyLink [application] does a good job of updating Lincoln Services but it is a job in itself to search and seek services.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

When I moved to Lincoln, I found a lot of new resources. I took advantage of every single one of them. I'm probably in 15-20 different programs with different people. I have huge support groups. I have my own place, Medicare, Medicaid, affordable housing, and I am finally making it. Out of years and years of just being completely lost and scared. Lincoln has been the best for me. It's been the best change I've ever made in my life.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Access to Education, Information & Resources

Access to Resources & Opportunities

Resource sharing and innovative brainstorming occurred in the focus groups amongst participants. Simply being in a collaborative setting allowed individuals to be further connected to resources and discover more effective ways to create health and opportunity in the community.

A big dream would be for there to be free community centers with indoor and outdoor recreation spaces for families to go have fun together.

-Community Focus Group Participant

It's too bad you couldn't have a program where you go out and adopt a highway or adopt a sidewalk or something - come back with the trash and get 10 bucks...other cities are doing this...paying homeless \$10 per hour just to go pick up trash. It's just different...I don't get paid, you know, its just like when the snow was out here..you couldn't get around the building...I would help and ask, "You got a shovel?" You know, but a lot of people don't.

-Community Focus Group Participant

When I was homeless I had dreams of a city that would build a wall with a lean-to over it so you could...just have somewhere dry and warm to go. I could find food during the daytime...I could get one or two meals from different places, but I would try and find somewhere dry and warm and I would find like a booth or something and the police would come and kick me out of there...I'd be walking in the rain or something. I just had dreams of a respite area...and I know in the bigger cities they do that under bridges and stuff. The smaller cities, they don't want to acknowledge that they have quite the problem, so they don't really build anywhere like that. But it's a shame.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Community members and stakeholders shared health challenges related to COVID-19 and also opportunities that the pandemic created. Looking and listening closely to these challenges and opportunities can lead to unprecedented learning for addressing health and wellness on community and individual levels. As outlined previously in this document, racial, ethnic, single-parenthood and socioeconomic disparities were accentuated during the pandemic. In addition to taking action to address these highlighted disparities, opportunities for innovation can be pursued as outlined by focus group participants:

- increasing clinic hours, tele-health and reduced-cost healthcare services
- increasing access to mental health services
- increasing community-wide socialization and neighborliness
- access to and increases in safe places for children and families to gather, play and be physically active
- employer-supported work-life balance for employees and families



PP Well, the thing with COVID is that you have people who are already living paycheck to paycheck and now they have to quarantine for two weeks and that just throws everybody on a spiral because now they can potentially lose their job, which means they might lose their reliable transportation, which means now they lost their housing...QQ

-Community Focus Group Participant

Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Importance of Social Connection & Mental Health

They were so used to socializing and like communicating. It is very hard and they just feel like very sad and lonely.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I think if people were able to connect more and network more, aside from...social networking...there'd be events, activities...that people could go to...nobody is doing anything anymore.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Some of the things that we see people struggle with within our community...the seclusion, the emotional isolation that you can't socialize the way you want to. Even if you're the most extreme introvert, you know, you're still needing that human interaction and the routine that we all have that we can socialize with other humans.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

You got a chance to see how strong your community could be.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I think since the pandemic has started, it's a total change of lifestyle for all of us...we can't have a social life like before...Maybe the hardest was for the kids...and I think that it's affected also the emotional part.

-Community Focus Group Participant

I wanna also mention the mental health. People, they don't consider it as important as physical health...and during the pandemic - this stressful time...it is very difficult for many people to handle. They have lost their families or even just being inside with your kids for unlimited amounts of time. We don't know anything. Uncertainties surrounding the pandemic - that's very difficult for many people.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Access to Resources for Families & Work-Life Balance

COVID-19 has highlighted a need for work-life balance, including free time for families to gather, connect and play. It also created an increased awareness for the importance of childcare for children birth through five years of age and women's roles in the workforce.

I think with the parents being able to remotely work, it gives the opportunity for more communication and interaction with your families with your children. You get a chance to step back and watch them grow a little bit instead of it all just flashing before your eyes...there are more Friday fun nights...nobody is leaving and going in their own direction anymore, you get that interaction, that embrace from each other.

-Community Focus Group Participant

[My husband] is able to work from home, so we're able to see him for like 24 hours and I'm able to shift the attention... and share the responsibilities so that I can have my own break.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Now I appreciate more what we have. I appreciate the family time.

-Community Focus Group Participant

The reality is that it's not awesome...I appreciate...getting to be home with the children..., but...I was overwhelmed and I wasn't used to being around my kids...and remote working - it wasn't that I couldn't do it if I needed to, but my kids wouldn't understand like, "Why can't we come into your room? Why can't we talk to you?"...it was a bit trying to balance all that out.

-Community Focus Group Participant



Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Access to Resources for Families & Work-Life Balance

The topic of women in the workforce and childcare [is] highlighted. I still don't think our lawmakers get it. They still just talk preschool, not birth to five...the whole family has to be healthy in order for the unit to work and so that idea of taking care of parents within the workforce and making sure that their needs are met...I think employers having to understand...you don't just employ an adult male and an adult female, you employ a family...That means I might have to take off and so that whole idea of family leave becomes a lot more important...that is mental health, it's physical health, it's the whole person.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I usually take my kids to the mall and there's a playground there and the playground is closed so they cannot play around.

-Community Focus Group Participant

So many places were closed down - just having somewhere to go to indoors in the cold winter [to play].

-Community Focus Group Participant

I put my kids in basketball, but for the games, I couldn't even watch the games. I had to sit in the car with my other three children and not watch because they would only allow one parent and no siblings.

-Community Focus Group Participant

We got a chance to slow down and prioritize our needs due to COVID.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

My son's a remote learner this year and...I wish he was back in school, but like I feel like it also helped out a lot because I get to know where he's at in his studies and if he needs help...if it wasn't for remote learning, it'd basically be the teacher like telling me where [to] help... but not really getting into details...I'm glad that I get to observe and see.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Access to Healthcare

I know for the clientele that I work with, a lot of my clients won't go to doctors appointments. They won't go to the grocery store. They won't go inside to get healthy food. They won't go inside anywhere because they can't bring kids and they don't have the support system for somebody to watch them at home. They don't have anywhere to bring them. They can't afford daycare...they sometimes don't show up for our appointments...

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

[The] pandemic brought on this shift to doing so many things either online or over the phone, which in some ways, is helpful because it cut down on some of those like travel problems for people who didn't have cars or reliable transportation, but it posed a new issue for those people who don't have those reliable ways to communicate.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I struggle the most to find resources for immigrants - people who do not have refugee status or citizenship.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

[There is] more interest in preventative care...people wanting to take more control of their health.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Some of the people we work with that have very limited access to either computers or smart phones or even internet with any kind of bandwidth is that everything has gone virtual...so a lot of doctors would want to do Tele Health...you would definitely need WiFi... I've had some families that even just ordering their meds has gotten a step more difficult...I didn't know that the Internet...would it be such an asset to people overcoming health obstacles...a lack of access to those things have affected some of our families pretty profoundly.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Increased Awareness & Sense of Community

Experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic led to opportunities for growth and learning. Community members and stakeholders increased their awareness of disparities, especially the racial and ethnic disparities that have been highlighted and accentuated with pervasive health data. Focus group participants do not want the community to forget or overlook these disparities.

Community members also see the community coming together to help each other. There is more access to resources and an increased awareness of resources.

Our clientele, it kind of shifted to people like losing their jobs...personally, I kind of see, like, there's a lot of assistance in Lincoln, especially like right now for people who have been impacted by COVID, you can get help with a lot of different monetary services...my worry with that [is] when that ends or when people aren't necessarily affected by COVID. Why can't we keep these things going in this momentum...recognizing these needs are still there, even when there's not a pandemic?

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

Nobody had to feel like they were alone in it, you know, ...it seemed like there were more doors open for assistance than before. For instance, if you need help with like a utility bill or anything like that there were people that were actually paying.

-Community Focus Group Participant

[A community resource] provided the opportunity to drop off diapers and...they gave us this shopping card and...there was a time they gave us another gas check...it's really been very helpful...They even came to drop it off at the door.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Challenges, Opportunities & Learning from COVID-19

Increased Awareness & Sense of Community

One thing that I'm seeing...it's starting organically: the seat of decision making and authority in communities are among themselves. [They are] starting to kind of rise up and know what to ask for or collaborate with each other on how to make some things happen whether it's a neighbor driving a grandmother to get her prescription medicines or helping bring home groceries from the grocery store...when we are healthy individually we become a healthy community and that has to do with how we care for one another's health and I'm seeing that.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

The openness of all of the programs that you can access now...I'm hearing about programs that have been around forever that I didn't know about like... programs that I didn't know existed.

-Community Focus Group Participant

Pandemic or no pandemic, that is an issue...we can see it more clearly with the pandemic...like putting up a highlighter over the issues we already know exist...I think it's a call for all of us to do something about it.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

...our staff and all of our programs have been fighting for and have been shouting from the rooftops for decades...The pandemic has allowed everyone else's life to slow down a little bit in some areas so they are more aware of what's going on. [Racism] is getting more news coverage. People in their circles are talking about it more than they were before.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

I hope we don't forget that what's been accentuated the most is the inequity in this system. I hope we don't lose sight of that.

-Stakeholder Focus Group Participant

The Photo Voice Project



Photo by: Rozalin Barakat Murad

Photo Voice is a process where people use photographs and captions to creatively highlight issues of importance. The visual image is an instrument for reflection and advocating for change. In addition to the community and stakeholder focus groups, a group of youth were engaged in a Photo Voice project to capture and express health and health equity in Lincoln through the youth's perspectives. Eight diverse youth, including seven youth who immigrated from Iraq or Myanmar and one born and raised in Lincoln, took photos on the topics of health and a healthy community most important to them:

1. Connection & Togetherness
2. Diversity & Respect
3. Freedom, Safety & Trust
4. Social Media & Mental Health
5. Food Access

These youth photographers invite you to experience the health of Lincoln through their eyes. Then take action to make Lincoln healthier for all residents.

Connection & Togetherness

Connection and togetherness are words that surfaced repeatedly when the youth discussed health and how healthy communities are built. For ideal health, connection and togetherness is multifaceted, according to these youth:

- Connection with other humans
- Connection with nature
- Connection with animals
- Spiritual connection

View the photos and captions to better understand how connection and togetherness can build health in Lincoln.



Humans and weather are connected. Let yourself embrace connection with nature.

Photo by: Zikra Zandinan

Some humans have been through so much, that they're done with other humans and need something to get their mind off of their problem...Pets can do that.

Photo by: Rozalin Barakat Murad



Connection & Togetherness



Planting can help children come closer to their parents and connect more. Since most of the time my dad works and then during the weekend, I have work so I can't spend time with him. We both like planting so that's something that connects us.

When you do something together you, like, remember it and your bonds get stronger.

This generation of youth do not usually spend a lot of time with their parents. If you have a good family connection, it is really good for your mental health too.

Photo by: Naw Bue

Each culture has different traditions and our traditions bring our cultures together and bring us together. We can have that connection within our community.

You can share that culture with others who are outside of your community and have others join you with that fun.



Photo by: Zikra Zandinan

Connection & Togetherness



You know how the man is connecting to God, humans are trying to connect with each other during this difficult time. In the shadows we think we're far away from each other, but, in reality, our hands aren't that far away from each other. We are still connected. Even if you're still in the dark, try to get into the light. Don't give up.

Food brings people together. A lot of cultures are different when communicating to each other with food or music or other stuff. So different cultures will have different communication strategies.

Photo by: Naw Bue



Photo by: Ghada Qasim

Diversity & Respect

Diversity and respect are important elements of health to these youth. A health community is a community where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected.



Allow others with different backgrounds and different ethnicities to be in your life. Don't be afraid to be in a place where you have so many different people.

Diversity is beautiful, like a sunrise.

Photo by: Zikra Zandinan

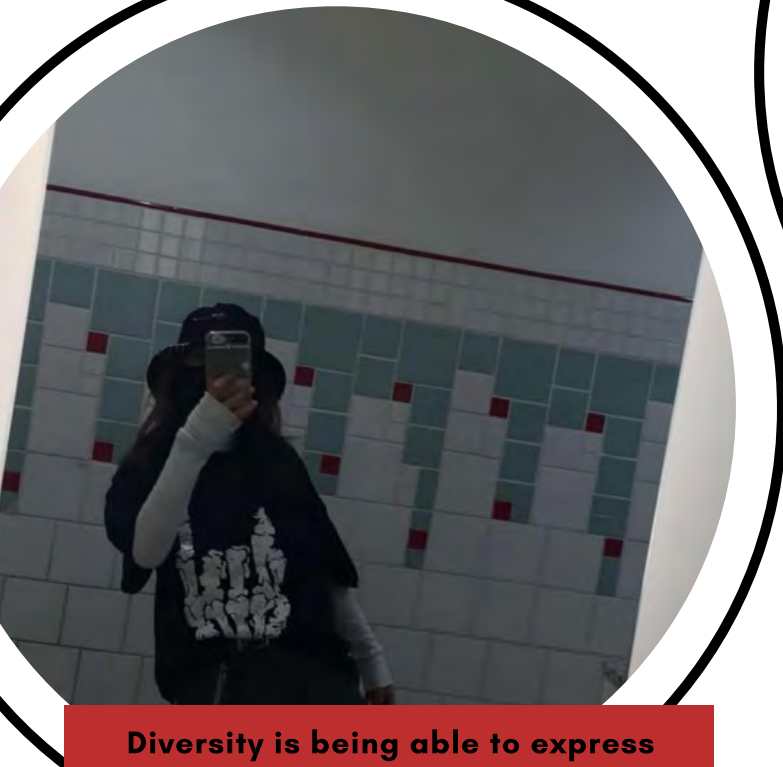


Two different guys, different races hanging out together, very happy and just chill. As we hang out with different people we kind of create happiness within us.

No matter the race, each person is a person - not their stereotypes.

Photo by: Nathan Gabel

Diversity & Respect



Diversity is being able to express yourself.

Just be who you are and don't copy other people...Respect yourself and be true to who you are.

Photo by: Ghada Qaism



Lincoln High represents diversity. There are some schools like Christian or Catholic that are mostly white people. Public schools have a lot of diversity. Lincoln High provides opportunities to all students. If you are, like, different from others in ethnicity or languages: you are not alone in this community. There are still people out there that are similar to you.

With diversity you learn better.

Photo by: Naw Bue

Freedom, Safety & Trust

A healthy community, to these youth, means living in a community that is free and safe; a place where there is trust between community members. The diversity of these youth and their experiences living in other countries, including living through war and genocide, provide a unique perspective to the importance of freedom, safety and trust for building a health community.



For me, escaping the war or like the genocide in Iraq...the sky was...like, here we always see clouds and blue sky, there we would only see smoke and hear gun shots.

Here you wake up in the morning and your hear the birds' sound and it's different...and it's enjoyable.

Here we know we are in a safe place. We can trust the people who are leading the city.

Photo by: Dima Smoqy

In Lincoln we have places we can hang out safely.

Lincoln has a lot of open grass space. And people take care of it so we have open spaces to gather in.



Photo by: Naw Bue

Freedom, Safety & Trust



We are Yazidis and we don't really have American friends.

She's the closest one to our family. She always comes by. We trust her. If you have someone in your life who is not the same as you or of the same culture that's very important.

BUILD TRUST BETWEEN ADULTS AND YOUTH AND PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT CULTURES.

Photo by: Sherivan Qizly



Getting vaccinated will allow me to have more trust with the people I'm around.

Photo by: Rozalin Barakat Murad



I feel safe at school. Lincoln high is an element of health within the community.

Photo by: Madleen Qasim

Social Media & Mental Health

Social media and mental health have a correlation. Often the youth viewed social media as negatively impacting mental health, unless it is used in moderation. Face-to-face interactions and relationships are preferable to these youth than social media interactions solely. In addition to the tie between social media and mental health, youth expressed the need for the community to increase access to and awareness of mental health.



Social media is not always bad, there is a good side to everything, but social media keeps us kind of alone. Social media is literally changing the way we think about & how we depend on or connect to others.



So many people are in their own bubbles, they're not interacting. They get used to being in their own space. Pop your bubble. Life is short. Talk with others.

Photos by: Zikra Zandinan

Social Media & Mental Health



The signs and walking trails exist because people care about others. You do not have to sit here and be sad. You can make a different choice.

Photo by: Rozalin Barakat Murad



We've abandoned our childhood playgrounds and outdoors for technology. Take the good of social media and then go outside and play!

Photo by: Zikra Zandinan

Food Access

For these youth, food access fosters a sense of connection, especially being able to access food at school. The youth highlighted the strength of equal access to food that COVID-19 brought about with all students - access free lunches at school. They compared pre-COVID access to free and reduce lunch prices versus friends that did not have that resource. Their friends would go hungry at school. Being able to access nutritious meals at school directly related to these youth's studies and learning capabilities.



Food access is built by neighbors and connections. In my neighborhood, there are a lot of churches and other people that donate a lot of food and help a lot of kids. I feel like this exists, especially in this neighborhood because they want to show that they're all together and connected - that they're there for each other.

Photo by: Rozalin Barakat Murad

Food Access

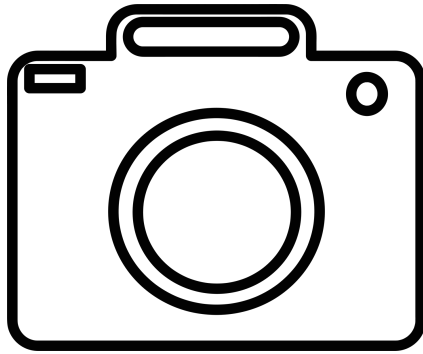


There are some students who only get food from school. A solution to an underutilized service...people who sit right in front of the cooler, when you pass by, they will be like, "Do you want a sandwich?" Because sometimes, even though the sign says it right there, there are still students who won't go get it.



There are a lot of students that do not have access to healthy food. It's important to give students food in school. Sometimes their families can't afford a meal, so school is their access to food. You can't focus in school if you don't have food. Without it, there would be many students who would fail their classes or not take in the information that they learn inside the classroom.

Photos by: Naw Bue



YOUTH PHOTO VOICE EXHIBIT

EXPERIENCE YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON BUILDING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Included in this booklet is just a sample of the full Youth Photo Voice Exhibit. Visit the Lancaster County Well Connected Communities webpage to experience the full exhibit.



This exhibit is viewable virtually at lancaster.unl.edu/wellconnectedcommunities



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A special thanks to all focus group and Photo Voice participants for showing up, speaking out and taking the time to share these experiences and stories to make our community stronger and healthier.

Thank you to everyone reading this document. It is now your turn to show up, speak out, and take action. What is one big or small way that you can invest time, talent and treasure into yourself and our community to make our community healthier?



