

Date: October 25th, 2023

Time: 10 am - 11:30 am

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82400093280>

Attendance

- Alison Christopher, *LICSW for Westford*
- Nicole Laviolette, *Community Wellness Coordinator at Town of Westford*
- Jessica Boulanger, *Transportation Mobility Specialist at NMCOG*
- Madonna McKenzie, *DEI Committee Member*
- Wendy Gloyd, *DEI Committee Member*
- Rae Dick, *Health Director at Westford Health Department*
- Gerard Coughlin, *Director of Special Education & SEL at Westford Public Schools*
- Abby Graham, *Assistant Director at Westford Health Department*
- Brittany Nash, *Regional Community Health & Wellness Coordinator at Westford Health Department*
- Gail Johnson, *Public Health Nurse at Westford Health Department*
- Siobhan LaFreniere, *Intern at Westford Health Department*
- Joe Mando, *Quality Improvement Consultant at BME Strategies*
- Jason Peprah, *Associate Public Health Consultant at BME Strategies*
- Ariel Slifka, *Associate Public Health Consultant at BME Strategies*

Agenda

I. Welcome & Re-Cap

- A. Rae welcomed and thanked everyone for participating today.
- B. BME gave an overview of today's agenda and provided a recap of the CHA/CHIP process.

II. Westford-Specific Data Review (see slides for data visualizations)

A. Discussion before starting presentation:

Rae: How would we incorporate what the kids are saying into the community health assessment? (i.e. the Panorama survey)

Ariel: Today we're looking at all the secondary data that we found but it's hard to cover everything in a meeting like this so we can put more detail in the CHA report and if there's anything significant that should be included, let us know as we go through the slides.

B. BME reviewed the Westford-specific data available for the following categories: Health Status, Health Risk Behaviors, Environmental Health, and Community Factors. Discussion during this section:

Gail: A lot of data you see about Lyme's disease can come in as confirmed, suspected, or probable. Lyme's disease almost always comes in as suspected or probable, there's hardly any confirmed cases. I would think there's a lot more cases that we are not seeing.

Rae: The same applies for foodborne illnesses.

Jessica: In terms of Westford, is tick-borne illness always Lyme's disease?

Gail: No, there are many others. They are all treatable and treated with antibiotics.

C. Based on the available data, BME Strategies identified the following indicators as potential key areas for Westford: Mental Health, Chronic Disease / Wellness, Affordable Housing, Substance Use / Binge Drinking, COVID-19, Environmental Health

Gail: As far of COVID-19, I would say the majority of cases are not reported anymore. People just take the test and stay home, it's no longer the scary disease it once was. It's hard to track who has what anymore since we have home kits. Also climate change will increase the diseases you stated, such as Lyme disease. As temperatures warm up, there will be different ticks and increases in tick-borne illnesses. So climate change is an important issue.

Jessica: What is the plan after these proposed topics?

Ariel: We will map them by impact and feasibility on a grid to figure out which ones we can realistically develop strategies for in the CHIP. So ideally, we select

about 3 priority areas from this list of topics that we will focus on at the next meeting when developing strategies.

Rae: We wanted to incorporate a community survey but we were not able to get funding for that.

Jessica: I think this data is great.

Gail: I agree, this is fantastic and you guys did a lot of work.

Jessica: In terms of environmental health, I think cooling for schools is another thing we want to talk about. Also for the senior center.

Gail: The library and senior center have an area where people can cool off. But I agree AC should be in all schools.

Gerard: Is there any concern about the social, racial, and gender makeup of the survey? I am wondering if we were able to broaden that up?

Ariel: For the two community surveys we have done, looking at the metrics alone doesn't give us the whole picture.

Gail: What's complicated about surveys, is that they are voluntary. So whoever responds may not reflect the diversity or representation that we would like. That makes it very difficult to broaden it.

Madonna: We haven't done the surveys, but we are working on how to get the contact information. We are looking at getting a group of students to respond to this. I think everything that was discussed is connected to each other in one way or another. For COVID, I have never gotten it but we got all the shots and followed the precautions. Outbreaks seem to occur at big events such as weddings and funerals. Binge drinking was surprising to me, since that is something that people don't really share. I don't think we have any idea how much racism there actually is. Usually, the students, especially from high school,

will tell more detail about this. There are a lot of unreported instances. There are doctors out there that don't get reported after inappropriate treatment to the elderly. I wish there was a place where people could anonymously report mistreatment from doctors.

Gail: Perhaps the medical director at a hospital could help with that. I would say that seniors tend to revere doctors as god-like, so they don't interfere with their treatment by physicians. Confrontation is difficult for anyone in the medical world. The elderly need an advocate in those situations.

Rae: The senior center has a program for providing advocates for the elderly. We can work on starting a program for that.

Madonna: The seniors tend to trust people from the senior center more. Mental health also covers all these areas. Affordable housing is a problem as well. For environmental health, we're having more problems with animals and pests, and I've noticed more and more fences being put up around the town. Those are my observations, but I would like to emphasize getting info from students.

Jessica: I moved to Westford in 2021 and I felt very welcomed. I always liked that there was a focus on diversity. I think identifying community leaders from communities that you are trying to reach is very helpful for increasing the reach on these surveys (i.e. utilizing churches or parks)

Rae: There's demographics on surveys that you would see given at a hospital or social media for example.

Jessica: I like how you mentioned social media, there are many different avenues to reach people on there.

Gail: I've noticed that the after school programs have very diverse groups of students. We could reach out to schools and work with teachers or club leaders to help fill out these surveys.

Gerard: Something like that would be really effective. I also liked the suggestion about reaching out to the church. We can explore a number of ways to do this. Since I am the education representative here, if there is a way to make mental health a key topic, it is a big topic for the school system here. It has played a big role in how we are hiring as well. There is a lot of tremendous work being done at the school level. We all have mental health and it starts in classrooms. If we could make that a key topic here, it can become an additional resource for students to use here.

Gail: It would be tremendous if we could develop questions for different school levels that address mental health.

Rae: Do schools currently have any focus groups for data collection?

Gerard: Last year we kicked off a Panorama partnership, which was more of a test run. The survey is always better the second or third time you do it. We are working on making more appropriate questions for different ages of children, so we should have good data soon. We will be sending out a more focused set of questions from the Panorama survey.

Rae: One of the things we lack for grant proposals is data on specific questions from K through 12, so it would be interesting to look at.

Gerard: Our superintendent strongly believes this should become a key part of the curriculum. We will have a better picture of that very soon.

Gail: It's wonderful that you have a vision about asking kids if they have a trusted adult in their home.

Gerard: We developed a partnership with Panorama to refine and improve how we are asking these questions.

Madonna: Is this a new contract, I was at a meeting where they were zeroing in on who to hire.

Gerard: That could be through a different group. I can follow up with you on that.

Madonna: I've been to one meeting, but there seemed to be a little bit of a bias, so I hope they are ready to accept the answers they find.

Wendy: We also must make sure that we don't miss out on caring for our elderly population. I've seen that our medical system is isolating people who do not have a smartphone. I've used my smartphone to help my mother track medications and such things. It can be very confusing. Elderly people have been thought to respect doctors and not ask too many questions. Also want to make sure we are not ignoring physical disabilities, and people not being able to access places such as the senior center. The school surveys are wonderful, but I just wanted to bring this up so we are not forgetting a population that deals with these ailments. Also, the prescription drug price has been increasing, and these can be extremely expensive. Access to telemedicine is also a concern with those who do not have up to date technology.

Gail: Everything you just said is correct.

Rae: Wendy, you should reach out to us offline, because we have the senior center as part of our new program.

Ariel: I think with these topics listed, the next step would be to look at how to incorporate different groups within these areas and make sure we're reaching groups most in need like adolescents and elderly within each topic. Is there

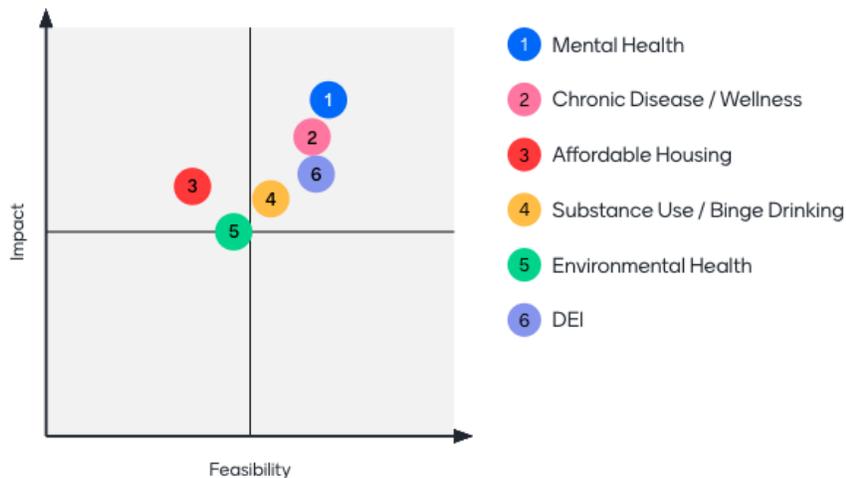
another topic the group would like to prioritize? Should we add a topic around racism or discrimination?

Joe: I think DEI should be added.

Group agrees.

III. Prioritization Activity

A. Participants joined the mentimeter link from their computers or phones to rank the selected topic areas by impact and feasibility.



Gail: I think mental health is a very broad topic. I think a lot of these topics overlap in general. DEI is also critical to everything we address.

Joe: I think we want to take topics 1-5. How do we feel about including housing moving forward?

Brittney: Personally, I do not think housing is feasible, so we should take it out.

Ariel: We can hold off on housing for now and focus on the more feasible topic areas.

Brittney: Ultimately, we cannot address everything that we would like to address.

That's why it's important to prioritize a few areas for this small group.

Nicole: We have to look at what is realistic for the next 5 years.

Group consensus was that...

IV. Stakeholder Survey Discussion

- A. Plan is to send out a brief survey to a wide range of stakeholders with the goal of better understanding the priority areas and fill in some of the data gaps that exist.** Discussion from the group:

V. Next Steps & Future Planning

- A. Fourth Partnership Meeting:** January 24th at 10 am in a hybrid format with options to join via zoom or in-person at the Westford Town Hall Second Floor meeting room. The goal of this meeting will be to develop the community health improvement plan based on the priority areas selected today.