

The OPINE (Asterhill's Blog)

Summer Series: "A commentary on making the connection between knowledge and a community's health capacities"

11 August 2017

Number 1

COMMUNITY HEALTH: *What's So Important About Understanding Demographics And Its Relationship To A Community's Health Capacity?*

James Carroll, APA, APHA, IEDC

Senior Community Health Planner

What is a community's health capacity? As a relative new term and concept, it is difficult to find a concise definition. However, there are plenty of published materials about it. According to Wikipedia (2017), it is described as capacity building, and is a process to obtain, retain, and build skills and knowledge. Merriam-Webster (2017) described capacity as the "facility or power to produce, perform or deploy." For our purpose of this discussion, **a community's health capacity** can be defined as its ability to adapt to changing conditions to sustain a high quality of life. The community needs to be able to understand obstacles and barriers that inhibit progress, and allows them to achieve measurable and sustainable results. The goal is to find that equitable balance between economic, environmental, educational, ecological and social equity.

According to Merriam and several other dictionary sources, "demographics are defined as statistical **data** about the characteristics of a population, such as the age, gender and income of the people within the population". The census has been compiling data about people's ages and genders for over 100 years. The power of computers and the internet have expanded our ability to collect a wider range of data and perform analyses not possible in the early part of the 20th century.

A lot of people say "**what's the big deal**"? The data is the big deal, understanding the data can tell one a lot about the health of a community. For example, we have become more a custom to seeing data with age segmentations for populations for cities and counties. In the northeastern part of the United States, many of these communities have seen a decline in children and families, and an increase in the elderly over 55 years old. The data could reveal more children moving away after school and older adults residing in their communities as they age. How does this impact the community's health.

What are your thoughts?

Mr. Carroll recognizes a healthy community requires a balance of economic, environmental, educational, ecological and social equity factors. He strives through a collaboration of community partners, stakeholders and professionals to help clients develop strategies and solutions to increase health capacities of their communities and improve the quality of life.

References:

Birt, C. A., & Foldspang, A. (2009). Public health capacity building—not only the property of the medical profession. *European journal of public health, 19*(3), 232-235.

Definition of Capacity. (2017). In *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/capacity>