

**Purpose** Provide guidance on assessing local agency needs and using assessments in program planning

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**Description** Needs assessment is an essential component of planning a WIC Program that provides services that are available, accessible and acceptable. For more information on the goals and purpose of the WIC Program see Volume I, Section A.

Community needs assessment refers to identifying the problems of an entire population or subgroup whose members have something in common, such as geography, gender, age, culture, health problems, or health service providers.

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**Analysis and Diagnosis** The needs assessment process involves analysis and diagnosis.

1. Analysis includes assembling and collecting information that:
    - a. Describes the strengths and needs of the population, including the prevalence and distribution of nutrition-related health problems;
    - b. Suggests problems that may need to be addressed;
    - c. Describes the ecological factors associated with these problems;
    - d. Suggests possible solutions and directions for change that can be applied to both service providers and the target individual or group.
  2. Diagnosis is the conclusion(s) drawn from analysis, and the development of problem statements based on those conclusions.
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- Data Collection**
3. Data must be collected to complete a needs assessment.
    - a. The data in a needs assessment describe the problem including the nature and extent of the problem, who is affected, and the social or health conditions associated with it.
      - i. Includes a description of the community and a review of the resources available for handling needs.
      - ii. Includes the target population's desire for a solution.

4. Suggested steps to follow when conducting a needs assessment include the following:
    - a. Assemble a technical advisory group.
    - b. Identify the goals for the needs assessment.
    - c. Determine the scope of the needs assessment.
    - d. Determine data elements needed.
    - e. Determine sources of the data, how it will be obtained and by whom.
    - f. Assemble and analyze the data.
    - g. Develop a statement of the problem(s) or community diagnosis.
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**Establishing  
Priorities**

Needs assessment can be used to establish priorities so that resources and services are targeted toward those individuals or groups whose needs are the greatest and for whom it is most likely that identified problems can be resolved.

1. The needs assessment can be applied at the agency level and used for guiding agency decisions including:
    - a. Suggesting and describing problems that may need to be addressed;
    - b. Providing a yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the program;
    - c. Suggesting possible directions for change or solutions to problems revealed through the assessment;
    - d. Establishing priorities for targeting resources;
    - e. Decision making about agency policies and priorities.
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**Component of  
Local Agency  
Plan**

The needs assessment is part of the requirement for the Local Agency Plan, including the Nutrition and Health Education Workplan. See Section D later in this Volume and see Volume II.