

**Title:** A Public Health Approach to Uncovering the Health-Related Needs of Teen Library

Patrons

**Presenters:**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction:** As libraries are re-envisioned and reborn as community centers and resource providers, what is their role in understanding and positively contributing to a given neighborhood's social determinants of health (SDOH), particularly among vulnerable populations? To answer this question the Teen Services department of Chicago Public Library, a licensed professional counselor, and a NEIU team made up of a faculty researcher, an academic librarian, undergraduate students majoring in community health, collaborated to conduct a needs assessment. The aims of the needs assessment was as follows: 1) To uncover the most common health-related needs among community teens as perceived by Teen Services staff; 2) To document the ways Teen Services staff are already addressing the health-related needs of teens and challenges associated with doing so; and 3) To identify resources, programming, and services Teen Services staff would like to provide to teens and how the library can support their staff in doing so.

**Method:** In public health, identifying and prioritizing health-related needs through a systematic, data collection analysis is referred to as a community health needs assessment. Our needs assessment consisted of a multi-phase process by which we identified and assessed health priorities, set forth specific actions for change, and established a system for evaluation. Targeted

surveys and focus groups served as primary sources of data collection whose design was rooted in, and eventually compared to secondary sources of local and national data.

**Results:** Findings confirm that some teens do turn to their local library for health information.

Health topics/issues primarily relate to mental, emotional, and social health; and social determinant topics primarily related to employment, access to food, and access to mental health services (e.g. counseling). Librarians indicated they felt most equipped to respond to social health needs and least equipped to respond to substance use/abuse needs. Additionally, most of the librarians had received little formal training to address health questions. Finally, the librarians expressed interest in community-based resource lists to which they could refer for assistance and forming community partnerships with local health agencies that could serve as a resource and provide both health-related programming (for teens) and training (for staff). Support from the library's upper administration, coupled with strategic goals and policies that support these initiatives were cited as necessary for ongoing success in addressing the health-related needs of teen patrons.

**Conclusion:** Collectively, the findings suggest that there is both an opportunity and a need for libraries to serve as a community resource in ways that could positively impact the health-related outcomes of residents within their service areas. Because health-related needs and the factors influencing them will change over time, ongoing assessment and evaluation is essential to assuring resources, programming, and services serve patrons in the best way possible.