UNDERSTANDING THE TOP HEALTH ISSUES
FACING MILWAUKEE COUNTY

PROBLEM
Health improvement cannot be focused solely on individuals, families, or communities; but must involve many sectors—such as health, social service, education, justice and government—to affect change.

BACKGROUND

The population health framework recognizes the complexity of issues facing the health of our communities and provides a broad perspective to identify and address factors affecting health outcomes.

Since 2012, the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership's triennial Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) has reported the top health issues identified by residents and community leaders in Milwaukee County (MKE).

The CHNA serves as the foundation from which hospitals, community health centers, and local health departments develop their community health improvement strategies.

In the spring of 2018, the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership and the Center for Urban Population Health initiated the current CHNA and released its results in January 2019.

OBJECTIVE
To better understand the burdens, disparities, inequities, and determinants that contribute to health issues of Milwaukee County and what influences them.

METHODS
Three sources were utilized to create the CHNA:

- **Community Health Survey**—14-minute, phone-based survey of MKE residents
  - Addresses adult/child health risks, health behaviors, and community health needs

- **Key Informant Interviews**—Conducted with health experts and community leaders
  - Identify community health needs, contributing social factors, and organizations best suited to address those issues

- **Health Compass Milwaukee**—a compilation of publicly available data, including sources mentioned above, on a recently launched website:
  - [www.healthcompassmilwaukee.org](http://www.healthcompassmilwaukee.org)

RESULTS

**Chronic Disease**

- Chronic disease is the highest ranked health issue in the CHNA, and heart disease is the leading cause of death in MKE County.
- Only 8% of phone survey respondents reported having heart disease in the past 3 years.
- However, 24% of survey respondents reported having high blood pressure and 23% reported having high cholesterol.

**Substance Use**

- Based on opioid overdose rates in 2015, MKE County has a rate much higher than the state, at 23 deaths per 100,000 versus 10.7 for Wisconsin overall.
- MKE County also has a higher rate of hospitalizations for substance use than the state of Wisconsin at 17.2 per 10,000 in the adult population, versus 10.5 state-wide.
- In MKE County, 34% of adults who died of overdoses were parents of children.

**Violence**

- While African Americans make up just 38.9% of MKE County’s population, 75% of its homicide victims were African American in 2018.
- Another violence issue related to youth is human trafficking. According to the City of MKE Police Department, between 2013 and 2015, 340 individuals under that age of 25 were believed to be victims of sex trafficking. Of those, 65% were African American and 55% were juveniles.

**Mental Health**

- In MKE County, the adult hospitalization rate due to mental illness was 86.2 per 10,000, higher than the Wisconsin rate of 56.4. The comparative rates of hospitalization in the pediatric population are similar.

CONCLUSIONS

Health is complex. It is our hope that this assessment and website will help amplify provider and community conversations about the importance of cross-sector collaboration for health improvement.