Needs assessment: 
A tool for program planning and community building

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Please note: The views expressed in this webinar are those of the presenters, and may not reflect those of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or the Australian Government.
Webinar overview

- Define needs assessment
- Why undertake a needs assessment
- Definitions of need
- Needs and assets
- Outline the steps in a needs assessment
What is a needs assessment?

“A systematic process that provides information about social needs or issues in a place or population group and determines which issues should be prioritised for action” (Smart, 2019)
Needs assessment – why do it?

Without needs assessment, resource allocation and service delivery can be:

• Subject to political pressures
• Subject to personal preference
• “what we’ve always done”
• Led by individual intuition

(Owen, 2006)

Source: Hunter and Carlow, 2018
Needs assessment – why do it?

• Can lead to more prevention and early intervention work and less work that is reactive (Baum, 2008)
• Foundation for an evidence-based approach
• More effective programs: programs that are relevant, credible, and appropriate, adequately addressing current needs
• To advocate for funding or other forms of support
• Build relationships among stakeholders and build support for action (Sleezer et al., 2014)
• Contribute to citizen empowerment (Ife, 2002) and community building
When to do a needs assessment?

- To inform planning and program design
- To assess existing service offerings
Understanding need

• Need = difference between “what is” and “what should be”
• Needs are subjective
• Some needs have commonly accepted benchmarks but many don’t
• Needs assessment is a value judgement
• The “need” and what is “needed” to address it
Needs vs assets

• A community development approach, or a strengths-based approach considers assets as well as needs
• Assets are things in a local area that are for the benefit of the community.
Steps in a needs assessment

1. **SCOPE THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT**
   - Answer key questions:
     - What is the purpose?
     - Who will use the results?
     - What are your resources?
     - How will you involve the community?
     - Who will be the decision-makers?

2. **DETERMINE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA**
   - Develop a list of criteria that are meaningful for your context.
   - These criteria will enable you to evaluate and prioritise needs.

3. **PLAN FOR DATA COLLECTION**
   - Identify the data you will need – qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods?
   - Identify any existing sources of data.
   - Develop a plan for collecting and analysing data.

4. **COLLECT, ANALYSE & PRESENT DATA**
   - Collect and analyse your data.
   - Synthesise and present data to your decision makers.

5. **APPLY THE CRITERIA & PRIORITISE NEEDS**
   - Determine your decision-making strategy.
   - Meet with the decision-making group and apply the criteria.
   - Prioritise needs.

6. **IDENTIFY NEXT STEPS & REPORT BACK**
   - Identify issues for the prioritised needs; risk/protective factors, causes and consequences.
   - Explore the evidence for effective interventions/approaches. Report on your findings to stakeholders.


About The Benevolent Society

- **Helping** achieve positive change since 1813
- **Innovation** Pioneering new solutions to social problems
- **Service** Community and home-based service to more than 60,000 clients through all stages of their life.
Who we support

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**
We support families to create the home life they really want for their children and themselves.

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES and CARERS**
We support people with disabilities to make significant strides towards their goals.

**OLDER PEOPLE AND CARERS**
We support older people to live at home confidently and safely and we support carers.
The Importance of Trust

• The trusty BBQ
• Showing up
• Responding
• Gate-keepers
Ensuring Diversity

Who should we be engaging with?

What are their barriers?

Structure responses

Process responses
Balancing Product & Process

MADD Action Group

- Shape community agenda
- Where is the energy contribute to vision
- Investing in infrastructure
- Building skill