

Vanderbilt University Medical Center and Saint Thomas Health Nashville, Tennessee

Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC), a comprehensive health system dedicated to patient care, research and biomedical education, serves communities across Tennessee, northern Alabama, and southern Kentucky. However, most VUMC patients come from Davidson, Rutherford and Williamson counties. Saint Thomas Health (STH), a member of Ascension, is a faith-based, not-for-profit health system serving Middle Tennessee, with many patients coming from Davidson, Rutherford and Hickman counties. Given this geographical overlap, VUMC and STH decided to collaborate on a community health assessment (CHA) to gain a broader perspective of the community and also to maximize the use of resources, enhance efficiency in time and cost, create shared incentives and identify aligned health needs across the larger community. They also worked closely with the health departments in each county.

The **collaboration** between VUMC and STH established an informal memorandum of understanding to delegate tasks, develop joint work plans, assign deadlines, record progress, outline financial responsibilities and build transparency in the process. VUMC and STH gathered qualitative and quantitative data that both health systems used to work with the community to determine priority needs. VUMC, STH and their health department partners conducted a joint community summit to determine the priority health for the CHA. This joint CHA development process allowed both health systems to move forward with the same same priority health needs, aligning priorities over the next several years of community health work in each community. Elisa Friedman, VUMC's director of planning and community engagement says, "It's challenging to marry two organizational cultures, one an academic medical center and one a faith-based health care system. However, there is a lot of value in both systems adopting the same community health priorities, and any challenges are far outweighed by the benefits of collaboration". Alexandra Norton, community health and benefit director from Saint Thomas Health, adds, "It's important to know the value of collaboration. It's helpful to start small with one key partner. We are looking into expanding our collaboration with others for the next round of CHA".

Recommendations from the hospitals include:

- Be transparent in the processes, as it strengthens collaboration and builds trust.
- Bring senior leadership on board early in the CHA process.
- Align priority health needs with other stakeholders in the community, such as health departments, whenever possible.
- Develop a memorandum of understanding to clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Consider collaborations with different organizations to become better informed about the wider community.

View VUMC's 2016 community health assessment [here](#).

View STH's 2016 community health assessment [here](#).

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