

Need

Previous health assessment efforts have not adequately focused on youth health topics, which does not match the ever growing interest in youth health data or the opportunity to prioritize prevention through a focus on youth. Additionally, the youth voice has been absent from previous health assessment efforts. Key stakeholders value this work (Denver Public Schools, Mayor's Office, community organizations across the city), but discrete agenda, fragmented data and lack of focus on direct youth engagement have eclipsed the opportunity for strategic alignment, common measurement, and youth participation.

Community Health Assessment efforts, especially [Denver's 2014 report](#), placed a high priority on concepts of healthy equity and the social determinants of health. The parallel interest in youth health and in health equity presents a unique opportunity to pilot participatory research principles in assessing youth health in Denver by working directly with young people to lead every aspect of this work.

Approach

The 2017 Youth Health Assessment (YHA) is a focused assessment effort designed to partner directly with youth and also engage with youth-focused organizations to gather information about the picture of health for the youth population in Denver. The YHA serves as Denver's first focused health assessment. Denver Public Health and Denver Environmental Health worked directly with young people in Denver to help better understand what health issues really matter to youth. A youth leadership team was hired to work with DPH and DEH staff to plan how to implement key parts of the project, collect data from young people across Denver communities, interpret the data collected, and advise on how the information is presented and used. The Team was made up of 9 Denver youth who are committed to helping the public health agencies in Denver better understand the key issues in youth health from a youth perspective.

Principles of participatory research guided youth engagement activities, collaborative analysis of existing and new data resources relevant to youth-determined interest areas, and engagement with youth serving organizations. Participatory research and report development for the YHA 18 months started in June of 2016 and will culminate with the publication of a comprehensive, actionable, and youth-informed assessment at the beginning of 2018.

Public Health Impact

Working directly with youth to collaboratively define challenges and opportunities related to youth health in Denver is a first step in building alignment around common concerns and shared strategies. By empowering youth to guide our understanding of youth health issues, this project highlights how youth health concerns are distinct from adult health concerns. This youth engaged community based participatory research will create a body of information to strengthen youth program strategies across city agencies and city organizations while raising awareness of youth health issues in the community and with key organizational partners.