As community members come together to collaboratively and intentionally improve the health of the community, it is helpful to use a well-founded model for community change. Based on a review of many national resources, this model (described further below) depicts the general process, grounded in local partnerships, of continuous community health improvement.

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**Work Together and Communicate:** Collaborating and communicating with stakeholders and community members throughout the process is the central practice of community partnership. If the long term goal is to improve key health indicators in the community, and given the complexity of today’s health issues, engaging the community in the process will be critical to success.

**Assess Needs and Resources:** As partners work together, the first step is to assess the health of the community. There are many sources of excellent health related data that are available on a county or occasionally at a smaller geographic level. These include not only health outcomes (e.g., morbidity and mortality data) but also factors that influence those outcomes such as health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors and the physical environment. Including the voice of the community through surveys, focus groups, or interviews is another important source of data. Finally, assessment includes analyzing community assets that are available to support action to improve health.

**Focus on What’s Important:** Once all the community data are reviewed, the partners collaboratively determine which issues to focus on in the upcoming years. Choosing just a few issues helps to target limited resources and maximize impact. While the community as a whole picks the top issues to address, each participating organization can select what their contribution will be to that larger effort.

**Choose Effective Policies and Programs:** Before implementation, it is important to identify measurable outcomes and choose intervention strategies that are evidence-based. Having measurable outcomes that are understood and shared by all stakeholders enables the collective efforts to be focused and aligned. Communities that use evidence-based strategies are more likely to see positive results, since those strategies are known to be effective.

**Act on What’s Important:** After identifying your evidence-based intervention strategies, draft a detailed workplan that includes responsibilities for each partner, a budget and a timeline. In addition to planning, effective implementation also requires strong partnerships and ongoing management. Many communities function well with a structure that includes a steering committee representing all key stakeholders and a workgroup for each identified local priority. Shared leadership of the workgroups increases community engagement in ongoing implementation and resource identification.

**Evaluate Actions:** Clearly defining and regularly tracking both process and outcome measures for each initiative will help to document the impact of your efforts. Choosing indicators that are already measured through current statewide and national data collection systems will assist in evaluating outcomes. Planning for evaluation should begin prior to implementation.

**Sustain:** Finally, it is important to continually pay attention to sustainability. Re-engage or recruit dedicated community members, address ongoing financial needs, consider changes in the community context, and monitor and report on the impact of your efforts.

For detailed assistance with each stage of the community health improvement cycle, there are several tools available at [www.wicommunityhealth.org](http://www.wicommunityhealth.org) (see Resources by Stage, Table of Resources).

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