



Community Health Equity Convening Series: Mississippi

SUMMARY

AUGUST 31, 2021

CLARKSDALE, MS



Children's Health Fund
in collaboration with
Aaron E. Henry Community Health
Services Center

With support from
Sanofi US

Summary

Overview

Children's Health Fund hosted the first social determinants of health convening on August 31, 2021, in collaboration with Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Local youth played a central role in determining the convening's guiding topic and proposed solutions. Nine high school students from the greater Clarksdale area shared their thoughts, experiences, and priorities for their community in a pre-convening focus group. Drawing upon youth insights conveyed in the focus group, Children's Health Fund and Aaron E. Henry agreed upon the topic of "Neighborhood and Built Environment". This intentionally broad topic encouraged stakeholders to discuss ways to foster a livable community environment, wherein children have safe spaces to move, learn, and play in order to promote healthy bodies and minds.

Over 25 stakeholders attended, representing diverse backgrounds and experiences, including local youth, the Chief of Police, Clarksdale's mayor, superintendents, healthcare practitioners, a Mississippi senator, and local government representatives, among others. Participants were led through a structured process that began with a mapping exercise intended to identify the local factors that contribute to both good and poor community health. The convening resulted in three proposed solutions to better the health and wellbeing of the community. Funders were invited to an hour-long virtual session that included a brief overview of the convening's progress, as well as formal presentations of the three proposed initiatives.

Aaron E. Henry staff convened a local youth group after the convening to determine which proposed project would receive the funding award. The youth took inspiration from the first proposed initiative that targeted mental and physical wellness, as well as family unity through parks and recreation. They identified a community park that will undergo significant enhancement to provide safe spaces for exercise, play, learning, and family gatherings. The youth presented the project to the City of Clarksdale, receiving full approval for implementation and a pledge of financial support. The youth meet monthly for project planning and Phase 1 of implementation began in early 2022.

Summary

Focus Group

Children's Health Fund (CHF) hosted a virtual focus group with nine local youth from the Clarksdale area on July 14, 2021. The focus group began with an educational segment dedicated to familiarizing participants with the social determinants of health, followed by a guided discussion period. Youth were offered a \$20 Visa Gift Card to compensate them for their time.

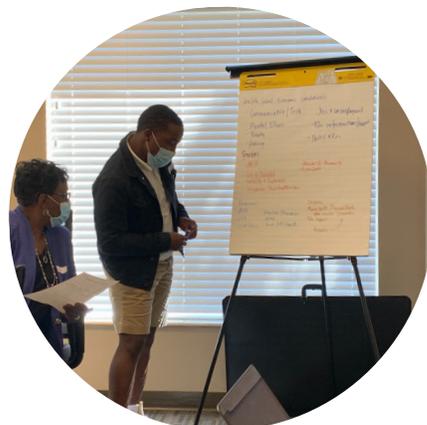
Participants identified numerous challenges in their community, including food access, medical expenses, financial barriers, lack of recreational opportunities, and housing shortages. CHF and Aaron E. Henry Community Health Services Center utilized the focus group findings to collaboratively select the convening topic: "Neighborhood and Built Environment."

This topic incorporated the majority of issues and challenges highlighted by youth during the focus group, but was broad enough to be expanded upon by additional stakeholders at the convening. Invitations were sent to community stakeholders that could speak to the various subjects within the guiding theme, including representatives from the local school board, parks and recreation, workforce development, and police department, amongst others.

Problem Solving for Better Health Model

Facilitators from the University of Mississippi Center for Population Studies guided the convening using the Problem Solving for Better Health (PSBHC) framework. The PSBH model incorporates critical thinking exercises to facilitate active participation from community members to develop feasible, measurable, and sustainable solutions. The model utilizes a five-part core framework that challenges participants to:

1. Define the problem
2. Prioritize the problem
3. Define a solution
4. Develop an action plan
5. Take action and measure/evaluate



Convening Summary

Emerging Themes

The convening's discussion led to the emergence of the following key themes:

- Brain drain and population decline as a result of minimal job opportunities
- Social inequality and systemic racism
- Home ownership and sense of place, including poor housing stock, discrimination, and maintenance issues
- Financial insecurity, particularly medical and student debt and the inability to pay for college
- Heavy industrialization and the resulting environmental hazards and forced evacuation
- Food environment: lack of fresh produce options and an overabundance of corner stores, fast food chains, and "Candy Ladies"

