

The purpose of this guide is to provide a common framework and approach when considering undertaking a Health Needs Assessments.

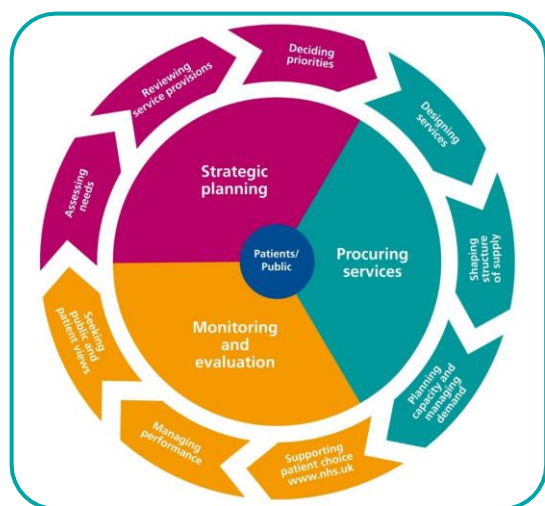
A health needs assessment is *“a systematic method for reviewing the health issues facing a population, leading to agreed priorities and resource allocation that will improve health and reduce inequalities.”* (Health Needs Assessment at a glance: Cavanagh, S and Chadwick. 2005)

Health need assessments (HNAs) are a recommended tool to provide evidence about a population on which to plan services and address health inequalities. HNAs provide an opportunity to engage with specific populations and enable them to contribute to targeted service planning and resource allocation, they also provide an opportunity for cross-sectoral partnership working and developing creative and effective interventions.

Why undertake a Health Needs Assessment?

A HNA is undertaken as part of the strategic planning phase of commissioning to identify and prioritise the needs of the population. Commissioning is the process of deciding what public services are needed and their priority; what resources are needed to allocate and provide these services.

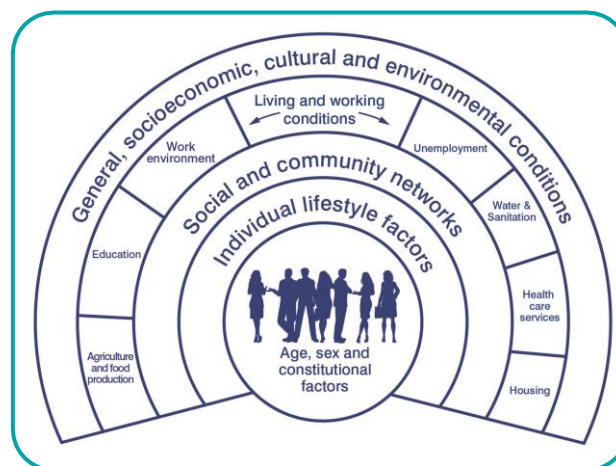
Figure 1: Commissioning cycle



Identifying a common language

Health - The health and well-being of individual people and local communities is affected by a wide range of factors. The wider determinants of health is a concept which suggests that there are complex, multi-layered influencing factors with an impact on the health of individuals. It is more than just the absence of disease, it refers to wellbeing which considers the wider determinants of health, such as housing and education. The wider determinants of health are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Wider determinants of health



Needs - Need is a multi-faceted concept with no one universal definition. There are different types of need, summarised in table 1. Need could be met or unmet.

Table 1: Types of need

Type of need	Description
Normative need	Need that is defined by experts. A decision by a surgeon that a patient needs an operation
Felt need	Need perceived by an individual. Having a headache, feeling knee pain
Expressed need	Felt needs turned into action. Going to the dentist for a toothache.
Comparative need	A comparative need is present when two groups with similar characteristics do not receive a similar service

Assessment – assessing the health needs includes reviewing the published literature for evidence of services/interventions that are proven to prevent, reduce or eliminate the health needs identified. Current services/interventions and their effectiveness at preventing, reducing or eliminating pre-identified health

needs should be mapped. Gaps should then be identified between current services/interventions and identified health need.

The health needs assessment process

There are 5 key steps to follow in undertaking a health needs assessment. These are shown in figure 3 below.

Figure 3: The 5 steps of health needs assessments

Step 1: Getting started

- Who are the population to be assessed?
- Why are we doing this assessment?
- Who should be involved, when and how?
- What skills are required?

Step 2: Identifying health priorities of the population

- Gathering data
- Perceptions of needs
- Identifying and assessing health conditions and determinant factors

Step 3: Assessing a health priority for action

- Choosing health conditions and determinant factors with the most significant size and severity impact
- Determining effective and acceptable interventions and actions

Step 4: Planning for change

- Clarifying aims of intervention
- Who is going to do it?
- When is it going to be done?
- How will the programme be monitored and evaluated?
- How will the plan be implemented and disseminated?

Step 5: Moving on

- What learning has emerged from the project?
- What needs to be done now/next?

At the end of step 1 it should be clear about the population you are working with, what the aim of the assessment is as well as any boundaries. Step 1 is key to the following steps and sets a clear direction and helps to manage expectations.

Common issues

Access to, and the availability of, appropriate data could be an issue. Data on use of services is helpful to a point, and often readily available. But building an objective picture of needs, not demand, is fundamental to ensuring that the right people get the right services, at the right time, in the right place.

Other common issues include

- Lack of engagement / ownership
- Lack of SMART recommendations / actions

Making it happen

Clear ownership of the HNA as a project is important to making it happen.

- Commissioner needs to be the lead, with support from colleagues and partners
- Tightly defined scope is extremely important
- Consider what data are available and needed
- Consider who needs to be involved
- Consider what support you need and agree timescales

Time scales

There is a relationship between how comprehensive a needs assessment is and the length of time taken to undertake it. Clearly a more comprehensive needs assessment will take longer than a less comprehensive or more rapid needs assessment.

Relationship to Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

JSNA differs from HNAs, however there is an overlap and any HNA undertaken within the JCT will be part of JSNA in Torbay. Content from JSNA can also be used to inform HNAs.