

UNITED WAY OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY

SAN DIEGO OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT PROGRAM (HEALTHY COMMUNITY INDEX)

Each year billions of dollars and time are invested in San Diego County by federal, state, county, cities, charitable organizations and citizen based organizations to improve the health of the community and its residents. These resources are applied to a wide variety of health, social and community issues. All concerned have a growing interest in knowing whether this investment of community assets is actually making a difference.

United Way of San Diego County is leading a unique collaborative process designed to be a comprehensive measurement and outcomes reporting system related to the health and well being of residents of San Diego County. The focus of the program is on residents' perceptions of their needs and capabilities and how current systems are, or are not, meeting their needs and visions. The goal of this program is to give community leaders and residents, government officials, philanthropists and service providers valuable information on the changing nature of the quality of life of San Diego County residents and new insights to all parties involved in how best to improve it. For example, this research can help decision makers make more informed policy and funding actions. It can help service providers to better focus their services and make more compelling requests for support. It can also empower community organizations and residents to better articulate their needs and visions and seek appropriate resources to address them.

Based on the learnings from a pilot study in 1998, the program was formally launched in 1999. Each year a random sample of over 3,600 households are surveyed by phone on indicators ranging from needs such as having health and dental insurance, to capabilities such as belonging to neighborhood associations. The survey includes the current need for, and utilization of, various community services, and questions related to satisfaction with services received. Specifically, respondents are asked if they have a particular need, was it fully met, partially met, or not met at all. In addition, survey participants (all adults age 18+) are asked to rate their perceived physical and mental health status and a series of other questions related to their general health.

2002 findings are now posted on United Way's web site www.unitedway-sd.org. From the home page, click on Outcomes/Healthy Community Index. You can then select from 42 topical reports as well as a Technical Report and a Sample Demographics Report.

While it is impossible to fairly summarize the 1999-2002 overall findings in a few sentences, some general observations of the data can be made. The perceived needs of residents on most of the 42 indicators did not vary significantly between the six County of San Diego Regional HHSA regions with the exception that the Central region was most often the area with the greatest unmet needs. In the vast majority of the indicators, the most powerful demographic/socio-economic factors that correlate with significant differences in the data were ethnicity, education level and income.

The program is designed to be an ongoing effort. Efforts are underway to secure adequate resources to continue the program in 2003 with a sample of 3,600 households using the shorter version of the questionnaire.

For further information about the 1999-2002 findings, contact United Way at (858) 636-4181, E-mail ebauman@unitedway-sd.org. Funding for this program in 2002 was provided by The California Endowment, Alliance Healthcare Foundation, Community Health Improvement Partners (CHIP), County of San Diego, Legler Benbough Foundation, Children's Hospital and United Way.