

## Exploring the Relationship Between Faith Communities and Public Health:

Foundational Partners For Creating  
and Sustaining Healthier  
Communities

## Arkansas Public Health Program Hometown Health Improvement (HHI)

- A **community-driven process** that empowers local communities to take ownership of health problems and work to identify and implement solutions that improve the health of the citizens.
- Based around the local public health system that includes all **public, private, and voluntary entities** that contribute to the delivery of essential public health services within a county.



## Goals of Arkansas Hometown HHI

- Bringing together **consumers, business leaders, health care providers, elected officials, religious leaders, and educators** to identify community health problems and develop and implement ways to solve them.
- Focus on creating systems that **promote, maintain, and improve health rather than on treating illness.**
- Strategies include: **tobacco-free living, active living and healthy eating.**
- HHI done through **policy, systems and environmental change**

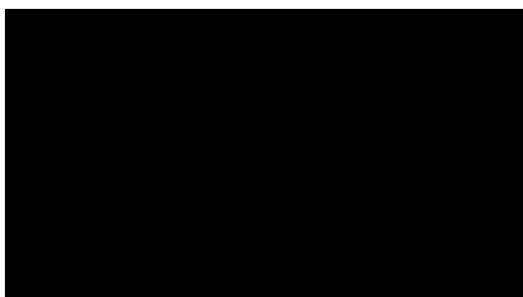


## Public Health Challenges to Accomplishing HHI Goals

- **Resource Allocation** – where to spend \$\$ and how much
  - Most \$\$ spent in Schools
- **Assumption of Capacity and Willingness of Partners to Participate in HHI**
  - What Level of Participation and Commitment Desired
    - Financial, Human resources (volunteer)
  - Establishing Partnerships (Are they Equal, Meaningful, & Respected Relationships?)
- **Different Resource Distribution** in urban vs. rural areas (Central Arkansas vs. Southeast Arkansas)
  - Impacts potential achievement of Health Goals and Outcomes
  - **Zip Codes** determine Health Outcomes



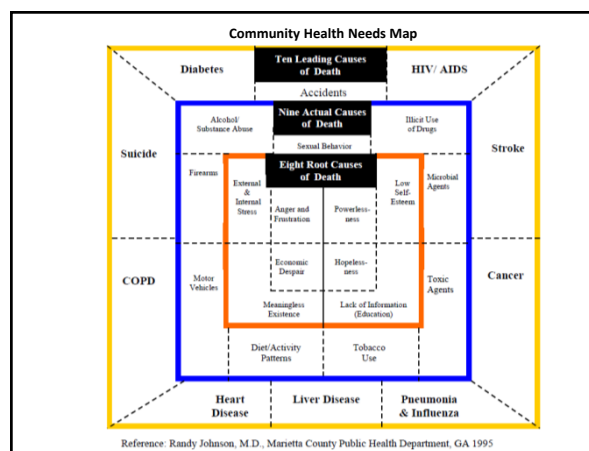
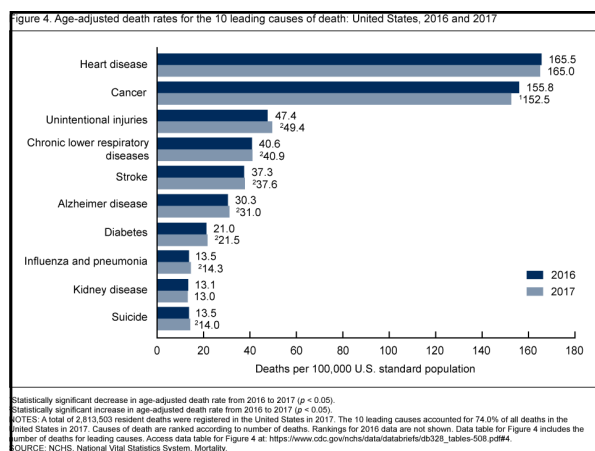
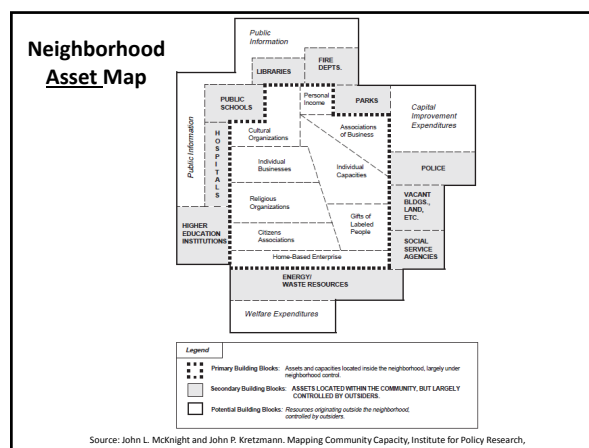
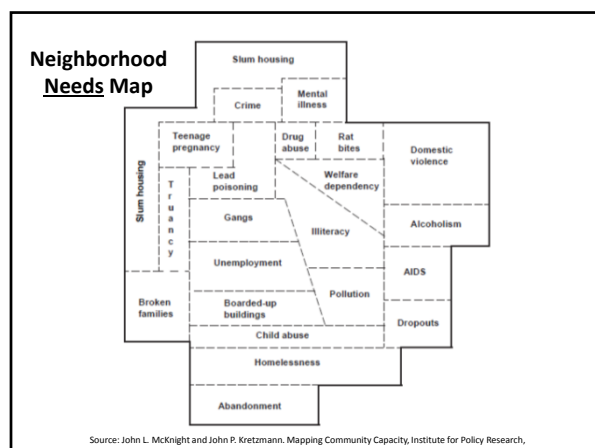
## Social Determinants of Health



Source: PBS documentary, "Unnatural Causes – Is Inequality Making Us Sick?"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXBkOYMCARQ>

## Neighborhoods

## Needs and Assets



## Eight Root Causes of Death

- Low self-esteem
- Anger and frustration
- Powerlessness
- Hopelessness
- External and internal stress
- Meaningless existence
- Lack of information (education)
- Economic despair



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Faith Based Communities  
Have a Great Impact on All of These



## Faith Based Communities

### Assets and Challenges

#### Faith Based Community Assets

- Faith Communities are **in every neighborhood** – rural, suburban, urban
- Desire to **do good and serve the common good** (including health)
- **Serve hard to reach populations**, including underserved populations and communities
- Faith Based Communities have **long legacy and involvement in health** (i.e. most modern example is with hospitals)



#### Faith Based Community Challenges

- Worship can be one of the most **segregated** days of the week
- Faith community's current understanding and definition of **community and health can be limited**
  - Serve my own congregation and/or broader community
  - Limited understanding of the relationship between faith and health
- Faith community's lack of **understanding the language and culture of other sectors** (public health, hospitals, government)
- **Faith communities need economic support** for sustained efforts (ministries), including health



#### Other Key Elements in Understanding Faith Communities & Their Culture

- **Pastor plays a key role** in determining congregation's focus and priorities, including health
- **Faith leader education and preparation on health varies**
  - Degree (seminary) or street pastor
  - Most are not educated or prepared to address health broadly
  - How equipped faith leaders are in properly addressing particular health issues is important (i.e. mental health)
- **Faith communities need basic education and preparation around health**

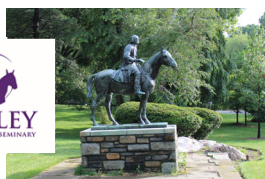


## Wesley Theological Seminary

Community Engagement Institute @  
Wesley Theological Seminary  
Downtown Washington, DC



Wesley Theological Seminary  
Main Campus - NW, Washington, DC  
near American University



## HEAL THE SICK

A FAITH AND HEALTH PROGRAM  
AT WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

## Mission of Heal The Sick program



Prepare leaders to advance whole person health and well-being of individuals, communities, and congregations, especially those who are underserved.



## The Need for Faith and Health Education Among Multi-Sectors

- **Growing scarcity of money and resources** to fulfill individual missions.
- **Increasing desire and consciousness by groups** that they can better meet their mission by working with others.
- **Individual sectors cannot address or improve adequately health disparities on their own.**
- **Moving faith communities beyond their physical walls, faith into action**



## Challenges to Reaching Optimal Health

- Shaped by numerous **social determinants**, gainful employment, affordable housing, access to healthy, fresh food, etc., which are beyond the control of any one group.
- There is often a **lack of awareness of culture, language, and motivations** within and between the groups.



## Needed Components for Different Sectors Engaging in Collaborative, Community Health

- Basic, Foundational Education for Congregations, Faith Leaders, and Sector Partners
- Building Trusting Relationships & Local Networks



## Basic, Foundational Education for Congregations, Faith, & Sector Leaders

Health education and preparation:

- "Whole person" health approach needed
- Explore understanding of personal and communal faith and health beliefs and language
- Helps one learn about different systems, structures, and cultures of different sectors (one's faith, other faiths, public health, hospitals, etc.),
- Helps one understand current sub-cultures (what is impacting a particular group right now)



## Building Networks

- Need for sustained relationships in and between congregations and partners
- Networks help partners understand each other's evolving needs and challenges
  - Crisis and Reactionary vs. Prevention and Preparedness
- Opportunities for mutual ongoing learning and sharing of resources
- Networks foster trust so that together all can build healthier communities
- Relationships move at the speed of trust



### Wesley Theological Seminary's Health Minister Certificate

- **22 contact hour educational program** offered by the seminary's Heal the Sick program
- Equips **congregations, public health workers, social workers, hospital employees, government workers, and others** with foundational language, skills, and knowledge in faith and health; including personal and communal asset mapping skills
- The curriculum is **based on national best practices** for health ministry from the Health Ministries Association, a national faith and health organization; the curriculum is reviewed annually and updated.
- The certificate learning format can be **online** (10 weeks) or **in person** (usually over two weekends), **hybrid** (new).



### Health Minister Certificate - Results and Findings -

- 110 Health Ministers trained in-person over 3 years (2014-2017 from Baltimore, MD to Newport News, VA)
- 180+ people trained online (Jan. 2017 till April 2019)
- Uses Pre & Post Training Evaluation Surveys to note changes in knowledge, skills, and attitude
- Based on surveys, most popular learning modules
  - **Active listening**
  - **Spiritual Practices** – Mindfulness, Theological reflection, Journal



### Certificate Funding from Government, Public Health, Faith Based, Healthcare, & Foundations

- Support & investment **helps train and equip local faith and health collaborators**
- Heal the Sick offers Certificate Scholarships with its partners to **make education affordable**
- Scholarship funding **helps sustain Heal the Sick program and mission**



### HTS Program Results Since Inception of Program

- **12 Congregational Interviews over 2 years**– assisted us in grounding our understanding contemporary challenges/opportunities/landscape in congregations
- **Numerous Tools Created**
  - **Common Health Ministry Models**
  - **Congregational Readiness Survey for Health Ministry**
- **Next steps:**
  - Pilot **Health Minister Facilitator Training** for Hybrid Health Minister Certificate
    - Develop local leadership in local communities to sustain health ministry efforts (possible partnerships – public health, hospitals, congregations, etc.)



### Key success factors

- **Ongoing Relationships & Trust** is important on all levels
- **Know your own assets as well as your partners' assets**
- Seek out strategic, collaborative partners who respect each other and **share a mutual desire for long term success and share similar goal, mission, and vision**
- **Need Formal Commitments** (staff, resources, partner agreements) from high level institutional leadership to front line people in ministry & work
- **Support 'Boundary Leaders'** (Clergy/Lay as Health Ministers & Faith Community Nurses) in this new health and healing environment



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