

Title:

Youth-identified post-pandemic priorities for a regional health system

Background:

Hospitals' efforts to identify and respond to social determinants of health (SDoH) frequently rely on individual-level screening protocols. For youth, such screens are often completed by adult caregivers and thus do not necessarily reflect youths' perspectives regarding SDoH or their expectations for how the health system might meet those needs. The KIDS Rainbow Youth Advisory Council was convened as one strategy to redress misalignment between our hospital's responses following the COVID-19 pandemic and youth perspectives and priorities.

Objective:

To describe a youth-centered initiative that aims to (1) identify youth-prioritized health and SDoH needs resulting from COVID-19 and (2) inform hospital decision-makers through youths' lived experiences – providing leaders a better understanding of patient family and community conditions impacting health.

Methods:

Twenty-seven Youth Advisors used a community-based participatory research method, Photovoice, to document the effects of COVID-19 on their health and well-being and its continued impact on their families and communities in Northeast Ohio. Working in three teams, Youth Advisors developed visual narratives told through their collective photographs, focusing on changes in their communities (positive or negative) observed since the pandemic, including changes that were most useful and/or impactful.

Results:

Youth Advisors identified the following priorities to guide future collaboration between the Council and hospital leaders: mental health awareness (insufficient direct communication to youth regarding available resources and services); community engagement (past hospital efforts haven't authentically connected to youth or recognized extant community strengths), food accessibility (growing adverse impact of community food insecurity on youth wellbeing), and financial literacy (recognizing economic stability as essential for health and resilience in the face of emergencies disasters and pandemics).

Conclusion:

Assessing youth perspective through community-based participatory methods proved to be both acceptable and feasible for not only youth but also health system leaders and decision-makers.