

LIVEWELL NURSING

Community Engagement

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

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**COUNTY OF
SAN DIEGO**



**LIVE WELL
SAN DIEGO**



Community Engagement

by: Angela Mitchell, CNO



Angela Mitchell

Community engagement is essential for improving health outcomes, particularly among vulnerable populations such as older adults, refugees, and other underserved communities. By integrating community engagement practices, health interventions can become more effective, ultimately enhancing health outcomes and quality of life for diverse community members.

Community engagement in our work here at the Agency involves collaboration between health professionals and community members to identify health needs and develop tailored interventions. According to the World Health Organization (2021), community engagement fosters trust, increases health literacy, and empowers individuals to take charge of their health. In public health nursing, effective community engagement leads to better assessments of community needs, enhanced service delivery, and results in significant public health outcomes.

Behavioral health, including mental health and substance use disorders, is a critical issue for communities. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institute of Mental Health (n.d.) reports that approximately 20% of adults aged 65 and older experience mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. The prevalence of substance use among older adults continues to rise, often due to isolation, loss, and chronic pain (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2020). Implementing collaborative care models that are client and family-centered and involve multidisciplinary teams, such as the joint model being built for the home visiting business process redesign, ensures comprehensive care, addressing both physical, socioeconomic, and behavioral health needs (Reynolds et al., 2022). Peer support groups can significantly reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are major risk factors for mental health issues. Programs that facilitate social connections enhance emotional well-being and provide a platform for sharing experiences and coping strategies (Jung et al., 2022). Additionally, tailoring interventions to meet older adults' cultural and linguistic needs improves engagement and effectiveness (Chowdhury, et al., 2022).

Refugees often face unique health challenges, including mental health issues, chronic diseases, and barriers to accessing care due to cultural, linguistic, and systemic factors. Community engagement is crucial in addressing these disparities and promoting health equity. By actively involving refugee populations in health planning and service delivery, nurses can ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and effectively meet their needs. Engaging refugees through community organizations and cultural liaisons can help build trust and facilitate access to health services. When refugees feel heard and valued, they are more likely to participate in health programs and seek necessary care.²

Moreover, nurses can advocate for policies that address the social determinants of health affecting refugees, such as housing, employment, and education, thereby promoting a more equitable health landscape (Scott et al., 2021).

Maternal-child health is another critical area where community engagement can significantly impact health outcomes, especially for underserved populations. These communities often experience higher rates of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality, driven by factors such as limited access to healthcare, socioeconomic challenges, and systemic inequities. Our public health nurses engage with mothers and families in underserved communities to provide education on prenatal and postnatal care, nutrition, and parenting practices. Programming that promotes maternal mental health, supports breastfeeding, and improves access to pediatric care can lead to better health outcomes for both mothers and their children. By employing culturally sensitive approaches and involving community leaders, our public health nurses create trust and encourage participation in Healthy Families America. Collaborative initiatives with local organizations can further enhance service delivery, ensuring families receive comprehensive support. Additionally, public health nurses can advocate for policies that improve access to healthcare services, such as expanding Medicaid or supporting paid family leave, which are essential for promoting the health and well-being of mothers and children in underserved populations (Fulmer et al., 2021).

As the population ages, the demand for long-term care services increases. Engaging communities in the planning and delivery of these services is essential to ensure they meet the needs of older adults. Public health nurses can involve families and caregivers in care planning and decision-making processes. By including these key stakeholders, health professionals can better address the holistic needs of older adults (Fulmer et al., 2021). Mapping community resources can help public health nurses connect older adults with available services, ensuring that they receive the support they need, whether it be in-home care, transportation, or social services (Schroeder et al., 2023). Furthermore, engaging with community leaders and policymakers can help advocate for policies that support the aging population. Public health nurses play a crucial role in highlighting the needs of older adults and influencing policy decisions that impact their care.



Community engagement is a fundamental aspect of nursing that can significantly improve health outcomes for older adults, refugees, and underserved populations, particularly regarding behavioral health, long-term care, and maternal-child health. By fostering collaboration, culturally competent care, and advocacy, public health nurses can enhance the quality of life for diverse community members. As the populations of older adults, refugees, and underserved families continue to grow, the importance of these community engagement efforts will only increase, ultimately supporting health equity for all. Live Well!



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**Access the County's EBSCO
Health Homepage using a
Universal Link**

<https://my.openathens.net/>

HELPFULNESS
EXPERTISE
ATTENTIVENESS
RESPECT
TIMELINESS

Community Engagement

By: Amaya Ly, PHN Manager, North Coastal Public Health Center



Community engagement plays a vital role in public health by fostering trust, which is essential for encouraging individuals to follow recommendations for preventative care such as immunizations and managing risk factors like high blood pressure. During these times while politics are becoming more divided and misinformation spreading quickly, people have started to lose trust in the government and health organizations (Bosch, Krust, Fung, & Pawar, 2025). However, we can work to rebuild trust. When community members are actively involved, public health efforts become more culturally relevant, sustainable, and effective. This leads to improved health outcomes, reduced disparities, and enhanced overall well-being.

At our Public Health Center, we offer services including immunizations, treatment for latent TB infections, and treatment for STI. Both our clinic nurses and Public Health Nurses are at the forefront of building trust and breaking down barriers to care. They connect with clients through education, direct service delivery, community outreach, home visits, and partnering with local organizations for referrals. Through these efforts, our nurses help empower individuals to take control of their health and well-being.



Community Engagement

By: Kristine Almario, RN BSN PHN, East Public Health Center



As public health nurses, we play a vital role in community engagement by promoting health in underserved communities, leading outreach programs, and responding to disasters to name a few. We wear many different hats to improve community outcomes, and we also bring the services to many of our clients by going to their homes, making access for them easier. Public Health Nurses serve as a bridge to help reduce barriers to accessing care by guiding the vulnerable populations and offering support. Through home visits, we build trust and rapport and especially advocating for clients when they cannot advocate for themselves. We empower our clients to take charge of their health and connect them to valuable community resources such as parenting programs, support groups, mental health resources, developmental services, as well as many other programs. We are here to make a difference in caring for our communities. Through advocacy, education, and direct patient care, we are here to ensure the communities we serve have the support that they need to achieve better health.



Public Health in San Diego County: The Vital Role of Community Engagement

By: Luisa Sawyer Senior PHN, BSN, RN, PHN, Medical Care Services, Office of Nursing Excellence



San Diego County, with its diverse population and vibrant communities, faces unique public health challenges. From addressing health disparities to enhancing community well-being, the County recognizes that effective public health strategies require more than just policy changes—they necessitate active community involvement. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated a need to strengthen the US public health system by shifting toward much greater community engagement and leadership (Chen, Alice T et al., 2024).

Community engagement in public health involves actively involving residents in decision-making processes, ensuring that health initiatives align with the actual needs and priorities of the community. This approach fosters trust, enhances the relevance of health programs, and empowers individuals to take ownership of their health outcomes. Public Health Nurses play a vital role in understanding the communities served with firsthand experience.

Lessons from the pandemic reveal the imperative need to move from siloed public health departments to a distributed ecosystem that fully engages the diversity, innovation, relationships, and resourcefulness found within community-based organizations (CBOs) (Chen, Alice T et al., 2024). The need for respect and a genuine willingness to understand varied circumstances and background of the diverse San Diego population is essential. Respect also includes appreciating and listening to local knowledge about the relationships and power dynamics within the community and relations with other communities in the area (Hickey, Gary, et al., 2022).



Over the last year I have been in a unique position being part of the Office of Nursing Excellence (ONE) Team and building a new role and processes for Centralized Referrals. I have had amazing opportunities to connect with many community partners and I have seen firsthand the value of open effective communication, a genuine interest in building relationships, and a willingness to learn and understand. Community engagement is a huge focus of my role, and I have enjoyed being involved in this way. In public health we all have our own unique part to play and contribute to make, in service to the community.



Janette Wolski, Rebekah Huppe, Imee Karty, Alejandra Sanchez Lopez, Mariana Delgadillo, Andrea Huerta, Jay Galanto, Luisa Sawyer, Liberty Awa, Araceli Casas, Donna West, Monica Hernandez, Yasmin Gaddum, and Drew Berlin

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Association of Public Health Nurses APHN

By: Denise Lozares, MS, RN, PHN, PHS Director of Nursing



Last year, in April the Association of Public Health Nurses (APHN) members voted Denise Lozares in as President-Elect and she served for one year in this role. She has officially transitioned to the role of President during the annual APHN 2025 Members Meeting. She brings a wealth of experience, leadership, and innovative spirit to this role. Denise states, “I am honored to serve as President of APHN during such a pivotal and crucial time for public health and our country. I look forward to working with members and partners to strengthen public health nurses across the country while advocating for health equity and best practices.”

The APHN is a national organization whose mission is “To advance the practice of public health nursing to promote the public’s health” and its vision is “Healthy communities through excellence in public health nursing practice and leadership”, which aligns with Public Health Services mission and values, as well as the County’s. All County of San Diego public health nurses are members of the APHN.

- <https://www.phnurse.org/>
- [Instagram](#)



LIVEWELL NURSING



May: Nurse Week Poster



Please e-mail submission (ideas, photos, articles, trainings, dates, accolades, local or national news, etc.) to

Araceli.Casas@sdcounty.ca.gov



For consideration in next issue, please submit entries by close of business on May 16, 2025.
Submission limits: 125-275 words



2025 Topics

January: New Beginnings/Resolutions

February: Sustainability

March: Workplace Engagement

April: Community Engagement

May: Nurses Week posters

June: Equity

July: Service Delivery Coordination

August: Immunization Awareness

September: Preparedness Month (shelters/wildfires, etc.)

October: Domestic Violence Awareness Month

November: Gratitude & Kindness

December: Systems & Technology