Perry County Health Improvement Zone

New Lexington Assessment Report

Prepared for Perry County Health Department
by Ohio University's Voinovich School
of Leadership and Public Service

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Public Health
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Perry County
Health Department

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Perry County Health Department (PCHD) received a grant from the Ohio Department of Health to fund a project to address social determinants of health (SDoH) and improve healthy behaviors of residents through meaningful community engagement and cross sector collaborations. PCHD identified New Lexington as one of the communities for the Ohio Health Improvement Zone project. Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service was enlisted to provide technical assistance for the project.

To assess health needs in the community, three focus groups were held in fall 2022 at locations in New Lexington. The following themes emerged from the discussions:

- Being healthy means staying active. More opportunities are needed for physical activity such as repairs and expansion of sidewalks, an indoor exercise facility, biking/walking paths, improvements at the reservoir, and a dog park. Affordable childcare is also needed to allow time for parents to exercise.
- Having a healthy mindset, positive mental health, and a support system is essential to overall health. Efforts are needed to inspire motivation for physical activity and build support networks.
- There is a lack of affordable housing in New Lexington. Moreover, the poor quality and inadequate conditions of some of the housing in New Lexington negatively impacts the mental and physical health of the children and families living in those conditions. Deterioration of properties also impacts community members' perceptions of their community and may negatively affect their mental health.
- Individuals' relationships and interactions with family, friends, and community members have a major impact on their health and well-being. Residents report divisions in the community based on socioeconomic status. Increased programming and activities—across all age groups—are needed to build social connections and support networks in the community.
- Feeling safe is an important component of mental health. Concerns about the ongoing substance abuse disorder epidemic and associated crime cause distrust, social isolation, and stress. Crime reduction strategies may be needed to increase safety.
- Technology impacts health and well-being. Excessive time spent using technology can impede the quantity and quality of social interactions. Efforts may be needed to reduce the negative impacts of technology on face-to-face human interaction.
- Being healthy means eating healthy. Greater access to foods that support healthy dietary patterns is needed to improve individuals' health and the health of others in the community.
- A part of being healthy is being aware of resources and opportunities that are available to you. Greater promotion of information and resources is needed in the community.

- Having access to affordable health care is a major determinant of health. The high cost of health care often prevents people from getting the care that they need. Access to more services in Perry County is desired.
- Many Perry County residents live in poverty. The difficulty of accessing resources to assist the poor not only impacts the overall health of those in need, but also negatively affects the mental health of the people who are trying to help. Additional support may be needed to reduce the psychological stress on community workers.
- Generational poverty and lack of education have an effect on health. Education is needed to improve health conditions for children in poverty.

In addition, the participants described a number of resources in New Lexington that they see as positively affecting the health and well-being of the community.

Finally, residents were enthusiastic about the potential benefits of the Ohio Health Improvement Zone project in their community. A majority of participants signed up to participate in Phase II of the project.

INTRODUCTION

The Perry County Health Department (PCHD) received a grant from the Ohio Department of Health to fund a project to address Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) and improve healthy behaviors of residents through meaningful community engagement and cross sector collaborations.

The Health Department identified two communities in the county for the Ohio Health Improvement Zone pilot project: New Lexington and the Southern Perry County villages of Shawnee, New Straitsville, and Hemlock. Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service was enlisted to provide technical assistance for the project.

Phase I of the project focused on assessing the health needs of the community. This report focuses on the assessment that occurred in New Lexington. The document describes the methods that were used to engage the community, the questions that were posed to the community participants, and a detailed analysis of the congruent themes that emerged from the focus group discussions. Substantial quotations from participants are included throughout the report to convey the richness of the discussion and provide the authentic voices of the community members. Appendices provided at the end include details on the focus groups, the protocol for the focus groups, the handouts that were provided to participants to facilitate discussion, and information on additional findings that were not directly related to the scope of the assessment project.

METHODOLOGY

The Perry County Health Department worked with leaders in New Lexington to recruit members of the community to attend focus groups and discuss what it means to be healthy. In the recruitment process, community members were informed they would receive a $25 Kroger gift card for their time and that the data collected from sessions would be used to secure funding and drive decision-making for health improvement initiatives in New Lexington.

A series of three community engagement focus groups was held at locations in New Lexington during late October and early November. A total of 19 individuals participated.

The community engagement focus groups were facilitated by members of the Perry County Health Department with assistance from community partners. Staff members from Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service (OU) attended each session to record and take notes from the discussion.

Participants were provided with a handout on social determinants of health and Perry County's Social Vulnerability Index prior to the discussion. During the session, PCHD facilitators asked each group a series of questions related to their health and the health of their community, including:

- What does being healthy mean to you?

- What do you need to be healthy?
- What things need to change in order to be healthy?
- Which of the items on the social determinants of health list affect people's health in your community?
- Are there other things that affect people's health in your community that are not on the list?
- What resources are positive impacts on people's health in your community?
- What changes do you think would help improve your health and the health of other people in your community?

Following the sessions, OU staff created written transcripts from the recordings of each focus group and conducted a careful analysis of the documents to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns that were present in the community engagement discussions.

THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The results of the thematic analysis across all questions discussed in the focus groups are presented below. Rather than presenting the results from each discussion question individually, responses across questions were examined holistically and were synthesized into overarching themes. Each theme was evaluated for strength in support of the theme. The strength of the theme is provided in column two as follows: ++++Very strong theme among most participants; +++Strong theme across many participants; ++Moderate theme across multiple participants; +Theme emerged among a few participants. Representative quotes from participants are provided under each theme as supporting evidence.

Physical Activity		
	**+ + + +**	**Being healthy means staying active. More opportunities are needed for physical activity such as repairs and expansion of sidewalks, an indoor exercise facility, biking/walking paths, improvements at the reservoir, and a dog park. Affordable child care is also needed to allow time for parents to exercise.**

- "Being active is what comes first to my mind."
- "To me being healthy is being active."
- "Walking and talking, walking and talking and not being out of breath."
- "Exercise."

- “If you look at Broadway, you'll see a lot of foot traffic. Carroll Street, the kids come from the high school, and they don't have anywhere to go, just out in the middle of the road.”
- “We don't have the proper pedestrian walkways to walk. A lot of us love to walk and love to walk uptown and just you know, browse the windows, looking, walk down the street, but it's a hassle getting from our end of town (Lincoln Park Drive) into town. It's dangerous.”
- “A place to like in the wintertime go that is not going to cost you a fortune to be able to go and maybe walk or ride a bike inside.”
- “The streets of New Lex, we don't have sidewalks that are decent everywhere or a bike path or all of these things.”
- “Well, I think yeah access. I just came out of a meeting with the schools and you know a lot of people use their track to walk on. Other than a treadmill in the wintertime, there's nowhere to walk because it’s cold and icy.”
- “I would like more access to different areas, trail, walking trails, things like that.”
- “The reservoir is something that is free and cheap that people can take their kids to do if we improve the access to it.” (lots of agreement)
- “I'm gonna say for me it's the recreation opportunities. We do have you know, we have the disc golf course and the park and finished trails, but there could be more. I'm not the person to say what it could be. But you know, if you do go to other towns, they have a lot of different things going on.”
- “You'll see them (walkers) in the middle of the road because the sidewalks aren't on every street or. . .it's crumbled. But sidewalks and walking paths are huge.”
- “I think the biggest opportunity is a safe walking path.”
- “I heard today, one of the senior citizens in a meeting that I was in said, I would love to have an indoor walking track. . . .An indoor facility for seniors is something we're missing.”
- “[We need] child care or child activities where they (children) could be busy while you are at the gym or even if there’s something to include them depending on their age.”
- “That [having child care at the gym] would be huge. Yeah, especially for like us.”
- “There's everything there (at the reservoir) but there's no shelter houses there. Restrooms, there's nothing like that.”
- “I have heard that like in, there's been talks about the dog park, hopefully eventually, one day. So I think that would be a good thing too, is adults and kids alike, can take pets out, you know.”
- “Recreation opportunities. Where I just came from, I was mind blown by how many people are out in Colorado, walking bike paths everywhere, right down the center of the main busy streets. . . .They've got designated bike paths, get off them, give them three feet. It seemed like there was a bike park at every corner. . . .And I just got out all the time doing something.”

Healthy Mindset and Motivation		
	**+ + + +**	**Having a healthy mindset, positive mental health, and a support system is essential to overall health. Efforts are needed to inspire motivation for physical activity and build support networks.**

- “I think it (being healthy) starts between the ears, honestly.” (lots of agreement)
- “Motivated in a way.”
- “I'd say disciplined.”
- “I need to motivate myself to want to do the things I need to do.”
- “You have to have purpose. You have to have something that you're working toward, you know, a goal that you want. If you don't have a focused purpose, if you're really not focused, you're not gonna be doing anything. You've got no initiative; you have to have a purpose.”
- “Like my husband wakes up at 4:30 every morning you know to go to the gym and I'm like, yeah, I'm not motivated; I sleep in.”
- “I don't have good willpower.”
- “I find ways to try to be active every day, but it's hard like to be motivated to do this.”
- “Mindset. You don't need a whole lot of resources to get out and walk.”
- “You ain't got support, you ain't got nobody to motivate you (to be healthy).”
- “It's easier if you have like they said support, a buddy system where you have someone there to encourage you to do it and you encourage them to do it and you do it together.”
- “A good support system. People around that make you want to be healthier, better attitude.”
- “Especially if you live alone because it's very hard, or very easy, I should say, to just say, I'm not going to do it if I don't want to.”
- “It's so much easier when you have a partner or somebody that you can do it with because you push each other, you know, you keep track of each other. But when it's just yourself, you can say, aah, I'll do that tomorrow. I'll get those steps in tomorrow.”

Availability and Quality of Housing		
	+ + + +	**There is a lack of affordable housing in New Lexington. Moreover, the poor quality and inadequate conditions of some of the housing in New Lexington negatively impacts the mental and physical health of the children and families living in those conditions. Deterioration of properties also impacts community members' perceptions of their community and may negatively affect their mental health.**

- "And that's the number 1 issue to help with the health here. If you create better housing, even better-looking housing. These people are charging $900 a month for rent for something. They have one d--- shingle on the roof and that's not right. We're going to take care of it, and then we're going to attract better people to live in those houses because they're clean and maintained."
- "Quality of housing and how affordable it is for people (is an issue)."
- "You get off 70 on 13 and you travel south. You come into Thornville; it's really nice. You know you come into Somerset; it's really nice. You come into the county seat, and you're like what in the world? What Third World country did I just drive into? I've been in Afghanistan. I'm telling you it looks like our streets."
- "51 or 52% of this community is rentals. Yes, it's huge. It's huge. And there are good landlords, but there's a few good landlords and the rest of them, I'd say probably 70% of those landlords are, they don't do upkeep. We have a lot of code violations around here."
- "I think you have homes where multiple families are living just to make ends meet and there's not enough beds or bedrooms."
- "We see so much of it in the office over there and it's very sad. If you pay your rent, then you can't afford to pay your utilities. So for a lot of people, it's very sad."
- "The person that she was renting from, she said the wires aren't even hooked up right, they started the siding, they never finished the siding. We're living here, I have three kids, I have a hole in my floor in the kitchen that we have to walk around, and it's big enough my youngest can fall through. They lived that way for a year. So that's not safe. And that's not the only call like that, you know, so I do think safe and consistent housing is an issue."
- "It's not just senior living, it's housing. There isn't housing available at a reasonable cost for anything in Perry County." (lots of agreement around the table)
- "Yeah, if you go, I mean, just on Facebook, when it comes up about housing availability here in New Lexington, it's ridiculous what they're asking! There is no way that a person

on a fixed income could afford paying $725 a month for rent, plus all your utilities, plus you have to take care of the yard, and all that stuff."

- "Safe and consistent housing. I mean we deal with individuals all the time that, you know, they're constantly moving from home to home or back to grandma's or whatever."

Social Connections		
	+ + +	**Individuals' relationships and interactions with family, friends, and community members have a major impact on their health and well-being. Residents report divisions in the community based on socioeconomic status. Increased programming and activities—across all age groups—are needed to build social connections and support networks in the community.**

- "You need friends."
- "It's hard to make social connections with new people. Because you don't know where to go to meet these people."
- "And we could have more things here in town for all ages, you know, and I think it's on the right track. It's growing and getting there, but it's lack of participation on both sides. I mean, we can have more, you can always have more, but it's getting the people out there."
- "I think recreation is a huge problem for our area. Although the school is doing awesome extra things for the kids, but outside of that, there's nothing."
- "But immediately if there's nothing to do, they (kids) go to the computer, the couch, the PlayStation or whatever. . . .But, you know, if there's activities for [them] to do, then it would definitely help."
- "I think more kid-friendly, kid-oriented [options]. . . .But now, if their friend, if there was somewhere that they could go to have a social connection in person more, so maybe it would help."
- "Yeah, there used to be hangouts for the younger crowd."
- "And it's nothing, I mean, other than going to Fiore's bowling, there's nothing to do in New Lexington."
- "Lack of communication because you don't, you don't know who they are. Maybe for some reason, they don't like you, you don't like them, you don't want to get too close to them because you don't know enough about them."

- “Like maybe I feel a little better than these people going to Founder's Day, so I don't want to take my kids to partake in these activities for social status reasons. So that might affect some too.”
- “Some people may not feel like they're good enough to participate in things.”
- “It (the social divisions) puts limitations and stress.”
- “I think a lot of people may be mentally stressed over like if you took your kids [to an event] then are you going to be mentally stressed because of what might be.”
- “I went to school about 40 some years ago and lived in New Lex and I don't know anybody now.”
- “I think Perry County does a great job of being involved in youth. You know, there's, there's so many things to get involved in now. You know, the next part of that is, can you afford it? And it's getting tougher.”

Substance Abuse Disorder Epidemic and Associated Crime		
	**+ + +**	**Feeling safe is an important component of mental health. Concerns about the ongoing substance abuse disorder epidemic and associated crime cause distrust, social isolation, and stress. Crime reduction strategies may be needed to increase safety.**

- “Having a decent place to live that you feel safe. Feeling safe makes you feel healthier. You don't have the stress on you if you have good neighbors. . .and a good community.”
- “But the issue is that when your neighbor is stealing your stuff to pay for their drug habit, that affects the community, and you don't trust anybody. . . .The point is that it affects the health of the community because you're on guard. You can't trust your neighbor because you don't know what they're likely to do.”
- “We've got a serious drug problem here. And those type of people, and I mean it's not those little kids’ fault, but of course as parents we obviously don't want our children around that, so that's an issue.”
- “The drugs, it falls through all social classes. It's not just like the poor anymore.”
- “Drug use is on here (the SDoH handout), but it's huge. And now, crime and violence. Yeah.”
- “One of the biggest problems is drugs and overdoses. . . .We've got more services on Main Street and in New Lex than, you know, one town should have. . . .We've got all the services here for it, but we still have a huge problem.”
- “To me mom and dad don't feel safe. But I think, you know, you see, we used to walk to school. That doesn't happen anymore. You know, they ride the bus or mom, dad pick

him up and take him to school. . . .It's what they're always saying, you know, I don't want my kid out on the street."

- "[Crime is] real bad." (lots of agreement)
- "Breaking into cars, stealing bicycles. . .etc."
- "Catalytic converters are being stolen again."
- "You can't trust anybody anymore because of all the COVID, the uptick in the drug problem and you just do kind of hide back in your own little shell, you know, and that way, you know, you're not gonna get hurt."

Technology and Social Interactions		
	**+ +**	**Technology impacts health and well-being. Excessive time spent using technology can impede the quantity and quality of social interactions. Efforts may be needed to reduce the negative impacts of technology on face-to-face human interaction.**

- "I think as far as like social connections, when we were kids the phones had a cord to the wall. You know now, the other day we had an 11-year-old call in a school shooting from the bus. You know all these kids have phones and what is it FaceTime? And TikTok? And all this stuff. You know our daughter goes to horseback lessons, and we're at horseback lessons yesterday and while she's waiting to get the horse out of the stall, she's watching TikTok. . . .I think that technology has a major role. I mean look at all the cyberbullying that goes on in our community."
- "When you walk in [a restaurant], what do you see? You'll see a family, and they'll be sitting at the same table and all of them is going (makes a gesture to demonstrate playing on a phone). They're not talking to each other! Young kids cannot communicate. They have to use their arm to communicate (gestures to show texting)." (lots of agreement)
- "Well, I think some people, younger than me spend too much time on their phones, but instead of with their families and their kids. And you'll be sitting there in a group and everybody is on their phone. . . .People spend too much time on electronics, I think."
- "I think it dehumanizes people and it takes away social connections. I mean it's easier to fight with somebody through a text message. . . .Whereas face-to-face, you have to like see their emotions and face the emotion, it's harder. Whereas a text message you can just like say what you gotta say and be like okay. You don't have to I guess humanize it or deal with them.

- “Like communication, they don't. I have a granddaughter who cannot talk on the phone. She'll text me all day long, but you get her on the phone and it's just like she clams up. They don't know how to communicate other than with their thumbs. And it's sad.”
- “On their phone they can say anything they want. They’re brave, it takes no courage, that's the way I feel about it.”

Access to Healthy Foods		
	**+ +**	**Being healthy means eating healthy. Greater access to foods that support healthy dietary patterns is needed to improve individuals’ health and the health of others in the community.**

- “To me being healthy is watching what you eat.”
- “Having a balanced diet.”
- “Access to healthy foods. I eat out a lot. I'm by myself a lot. And I eat out a lot. And there's really, really nothing. There's a lot of people that are looking for healthy foods and alternatives.”
- “That's important, you know and that goes back to mental and physical health. If I'm hungry, you know my mental health diminishes rapidly.”
- “Other than Kroger's produce? No, we don't have healthy choices. Well, there's restaurants to eat in, and some of them have salads, but really, there's nothing healthy.”
- “Our Kroger's doesn't even have hardly anything anymore. Literally, it's horrible.”
- “You know, there aren't a lot of healthy options.”

Information Awareness		
	**+ +**	**A part of being healthy is being aware of resources and opportunities that are available to you. Greater promotion of information and resources is needed in the community.**

- “There's not enough information put out to the public of what is available to them.”
- “I'm saying like we don't know, we can't do what we don't know.”

- “Getting it out there, I think. More advertisement not really advertising but getting the information out there.”
- “I still think there's a lot of not knowing, like we just don't know. I just learned that in some recent time that I think it was the health department had bicycles down there on State Street that people could ride. I had no idea.”
- “There are people who say, well, there’s nothing here. There’s nothing. Well, there’s a finished trail, the cemetery right here, the park, you know, there are options, right?”
- “Do you remember a few years ago, I can't remember who was running for office, here in Perry County. And they made out these big magnets and it had every program, every department and everything. And they gave one of those to every person that they went to their door. You can't find that information anymore! You know if you don't have that or a phone book or, you know, your phone to look up on your cell phone. And it can just be like ‘oh forget it. I'm tired of trying to find out who I'm supposed to get a hold of and I can't get a hold of them.’”
- “Or if heaven forbid, you know, you got to work with your doctor and pharmacist to make sure your meds are right. You know, is that a phone call that you know, someone you know. How do you know what questions to ask? If you don't know, you don't know what you don't know. You don't get it and then the next thing you know you're at the desk, getting your meds that your doctor prescribed and it's 170 some dollars. When last week, month it was. . . .It's not okay. So I don't know. Hotlines? I know that we've all, you know, many of us know that they're out there. But do others? How do we get that information to people?”

Access to Health Care		
	**+ +**	**Having access to affordable health care is a major determinant of health. The high cost of health care often prevents people from getting the care that they need. Access to more services in Perry County is desired.**

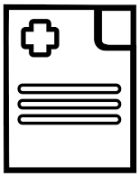
- “I mentioned access to health care. I work in health care, and watching and listening to a lot of my clients [who] can't get dialysis without going out of the county. We have a lot of things, but I know transit takes many people, you know, to those appointments, but, you know, for short-term rehab, I'm, you know, right here in Perry County, and we can't accept a dialysis patient because we're not 100% sure if we're gonna have transportation. So yeah, it's tough. So I see that, you know, those people were, you know, I don't wanna say suffering but you know, they can't get the health care they need immediately here with their loved ones and their support group because they have to go somewhere else to get [the services they need].”

- “You can't get the services that you need unless you go out of the town again. And you could be talking Athens, Lancaster, Pickerington, Zanesville, wherever they want to send you.”
- “Even though you have health insurance, deductibles are so high, you don't always have the things done that you need to have done because that deductible and your copays get very, very expensive.”
- “And financially, I mean, yeah, when we're looking at families living on fixed incomes, you know, transportation to get there. I mean, sure, it's going to cost less and your insurance is going to pay in Pickerington, but now I'm gonna pay my buddy, or someplace else, you know, this money (to drive me there). So I've just really shot myself in the foot. And I see that a lot. And then that's tough, you know, because it's just as easy not to go get that treatment, you know?
- “That right there (ER) is a disappointment. They said if you put the tax money in to build this, you won't have to life flight people to Columbus for a stroke. You won't have to life flight them to Columbus for a heart attack. But they life flight everything every day. That’s what that place was built for, to keep people from having to be flown to Columbus.”

Access to Resources		
	**+ +**	**Many Perry County residents live in poverty. The difficulty of accessing resources to assist the poor not only impacts the overall health of those in need, but also negatively affects the mental health of the people who are trying to help. Additional support may be needed to reduce the psychological stress on community workers.**

- “I’m just angry because there's nothing I can do. . . .I've done this job for about two years now so I don't take it personal. And you can't, but like it's very frustrating because you have to stand there and just nod your head and tell these people like ‘It's going to be OK’ or whatever. But there's nothing I can do, and there's nothing that I can say, and there's nothing I can do to make it better at that time. And you just get frustrated because you know you tell them ‘Hey, there's resources out there’ but the access to them is just pretty hard to get. You know you call numbers, and you call people, and sometimes you don't get responses whenever you get a voicemail, and you never hear anything back.”
- “These resources that are available when we call to get these people help, it's well, ‘do they meet this? Do they meet that?’ Well, it doesn't matter, they're hungry. That's it.”

- “I had a guy he was in an electric scooter bawling his eyes out, an elderly man. He had nowhere to go. Yeah, and I called this so-called homeless shelter thing. . . .They said, ‘Well, we can get him a meal voucher for McDonald's.’ What the h--- is that solving?. . . . These resources, resources are so hard to get!”
- “I’ve heard that Children Services will leave kids in a home with no water. And there's people in this town that haven't had water for months and months and months at a time with kids living there. I don't understand how that happens?”
- “We go in circles in our meetings trying to find resources on how to fix this problem, then we need to fix this other. . . .”
- “I've literally been on scene with Children Services. The lady didn't have water. When we pulled in, she was coming up over the hill from the creek with two five-gallon buckets of water and (Children’s Services) said, ‘Well—she's providing water.’ That's sickening.”
- “There's a lot of hungry kids.”
- “Because there's the people that fall just above there don't make enough to pay everything and feed their families but still can't get help.”

Education		
	+	**Generational poverty and lack of education have an effect on health. Education is needed to improve health conditions for children in poverty.**

- “I think education is a big part of when it comes to health, like not everybody (knws). You know, all of this is just how it is, this is how I'm gonna have to live.”
- “You know, if you grew up living this way, living in this home, this is all you know.”
- “And then those poor kids grow up like that (in unsanitary conditions) so they don't know any difference. So then it continues for generations.”
- “There may be those that don't know how to cook or don't have a stove or have a microwave, I mean I don't know. But I thought that same thing and then someone came to me and said like what am I going to do with a bag of potatoes. I mean, I mean I grew up in a home where you know we farm worked or gardened or whatever and you know the potatoes were in the basement for the year with the kraut in the whatever that's how my parents raised me.”
- “Now when you get those blessings in a bag, I've had so many kids come up to me that have a can of green beans and canned peas or corn. And they're like, how am I going to open this? How am I going to, it doesn't have a pop tap for me to open. They'd eat it right out of that can.”

COMMUNITY ATTRIBUTES AND RESOURCES

The participants described several factors in New Lexington that they see as positively impacting the health and well-being of the community. Specific resources that were mentioned are listed below with representative quotes from participants as supporting evidence.

The School

- "For our area, all the school is doing [is] awesome."
- "I mean, having enough food to eat on a regular basis, for some of our kids, they only eat at school. And our schools are doing a great job. I mean, you know, they send home meals."
- "But I say, you know, for young families, what the school district offered to my kids kept us here."
- "During the summer the school, New Lexington School District, prepares 18,000 meals and distributes them through the whole county."
- "The school seemed like to me that New Lex is great. I've been working with them and what they're doing is amazing. I can't say that for some other school districts."
- "Just the school system, like the playground, the new playground, I didn't have that. I won't say it's strong, but it's definitely getting better."
- "Because I know that my kids got a good education. And weren't threatened in the classroom, weren't intimidated."
- "I don't know if you know, but the school is building a workforce development building down here, that's going to be huge. Our 17-year-old daughter got certified in welding last year. I was down there the other day and they were building their own computers. I can't even plug a mouse into a computer. We're offering our kids, our students, something that they may never have been able to do aside from our schools."

Access to Mental Health Resources

- "Perry Behavioral Health is the best thing that could've happened in New Lexington."
- "There is a large group of people that are going through the Behavioral Health Choice. . . .There's multiple buildings up there. So I think from the drug standpoint that we talked about, there's all kinds of resources from a positive standpoint."
- "You can have mental health counseling, you know, to an extent, drug and alcohol counseling, to an extent there (Hopewell Health Center) . . . .But you can also go to the doctor there, you can go to WIC if you're a WIC participant, plus, you have your dental clinic and one stop shop."
- "Hopewell offers you know, the AOD (alcohol and other drug) counseling. . . .You know, there I think there's a lot of positive as far as access to what's available for it."

Recreational Opportunities

- “We have a gorgeous reservoir. There's eagles there. There's everything.”
- “This gym appears, oh, it's busy. I think it's kind of hidden. Nobody knows what it is. It says New Dimensions and says travel agency. . . .I didn't know what it was until one day, I'm going down [to] the basement like holy cow. It's a big gym.”
- “There's a lot of things that are recreational out here.”

Access to Health Care

- “I think health care access has come a long way in our area. And I think it's a great idea, two dental offices, you know, the doctors’ offices we have close, the ER, you know, now you can have lab, I think that's a positive right there.”
- “Oh, yes, right, we got a diagnostic center and stuff down here now.”
- “There's a convenience of having the ER in Somerset, because you can go there and get testing and stuff done without driving far.”

The Residents

- “I think we can all agree that nearly every weekend, if someone's in need in Perry County there's people here to help.” (lots of agreement)
- “There's several people (who are assets).”
- “There's hope (because of the people).”
- “We take care of each other.”

The Senior Center

- “I'm beside the senior center, which provides lunches. We have recreation, Euchre, bingo, and we just have anything really we suggest, our director tries to accommodate. But it is a great place to meet people and [have] social communication. So I really recommend going to the senior center if you're the age.”

CONCLUSION

Phase I of Perry County Health Department’s Ohio Health Improvement Zone project focused on assessing the health needs of the residents of New Lexington. Through three community engagement focus groups in fall 2022 centered on the social determinants of health, residents provided detailed information about factors that impact their health and the health of their communities.

Focus group participants described a number of changes they felt would improve the health and well-being of individuals in New Lexington:

- More opportunities for physical activity such as repairs and expansion of sidewalks, an indoor exercise facility, biking/walking paths, improvements at the reservoir, and a dog park;
- Efforts to inspire motivation for physical activity and to build support networks;
- Improvements in the availability and quality of housing in the community;
- Increased programming and activities to build social connections in the community;
- Strategies to reduce crime and increase safety;
- Efforts to reduce the negative impacts of technology on face-to-face social interaction;
- More access to foods that support healthy dietary patterns;
- Greater promotion of community information and resources;
- Access to more healthcare services in the county;
- Efforts to reduce the psychological stress on community workers; and
- Education to improve health conditions for children in poverty.

These suggestions, along with the enthusiastic interest and support from the community residents who registered to be involved in the project, provide the Perry County Health Department a wide range of options for moving into Phase II of the project.

APPENDIX A

Date, Time, and Location of New Lexington Focus Groups

The table below provides information on participation in the three community engagement focus groups that were held.

DATE	TIME	LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS
October 27, 2022	1-3 p.m.	New Lexington City Hall, 215 S. Main Street	4 females 2 males
October 27, 2022	3-5 p.m.	New Lexington City Hall, 215 S. Main Street	2 females
November 9, 2022	6-7:30 p.m.	Perry Behavioral Health Activity Center, 112 S. Main Street, New Lexington	7 females 4 males
		TOTAL	**19** **13 females; 6 males**

APPENDIX B

Script for Perry County OHIZ Community Engagement Focus Groups

Introductory Text

- Introduce facilitator and anyone assisting.
- (As participants arrive, OU contacts will be taking care of paperwork for the $25 Kroger Gift Cards)
- Explain purpose of session. Explain that this session is one of many.
- Explain what will be done with information collected.

Ice Breaker *(5 minutes)*

1. To get started, let's go around the room and have everyone say their name and then give us 2 or 3 words to tell us how you're feeling today.

Transition *(5-10 minutes)*

2. The word healthy can mean different things to different people. What does "being healthy" mean to you?

   Prompts, if needed:

   a. What does it look like when someone is healthy?
   b. What words would you use to describe someone who is healthy?
   c. Are there different ways to be healthy?

Key Questions

3. What do you need to be healthy? *(10 minutes)*

   Prompts, if needed:

   a. Let's think about how we defined "being healthy." What do you need to achieve that?
   b. Another way to look at this question is to think about what might get in the way of being healthy. Are there things that might need to change in order to be healthy?

Some people who study health have come up with a list of things they say affect our chances of being healthy. These are listed on the social determinants of health handout. Each row includes the categories, underneath each you'll see the specific factors that people say affect your health. Please take a minute to go through this list, and think about your own experiences and your community.

4. Which of the items on the list affect people's health in your community?

Follow up: How does this affect people's health?

5. Are there other things that affect people's health in your community that should be on this list?

6. Overall, how does living in this community impact your health?

7. We will be having more meetings later to select and plan projects that support the health of those of us living in [community name]. If you want to be a part of this process, I will be happy to give you more information when we're done with today's discussion. In the meantime, let's get a head start on that process by answering our final question. What changes do you think would help improve your health and the health of other people in your community?

Thank you for helping us understand the issues that affect your health and the health of others in the community. We want to take this information and use it to identify a way forward that helps support the health of people in [community name].

Social Determinants of Health

Our personal circumstances impact our health and well-being.

How do the factors below impact your health?

Health Care Access and Quality

- Access to Healthcare
- Health Insurance Coverage
- Health Literacy

Neighborhood and Housing Stability

- Quality of Housing
- Transportation
- Access to Healthy Foods
- Quality of the Air and Water
- Crime and Violence
- Recreation Opportunities

Social and Community Context

- Discrimination
- Social Connections
- Imprisonment
- Workplace Safety

Economic Stability

- Having a Job
- Poverty
- Having Enough Food to Eat on a Regular Basis
- Having Safe and Consistent Housing

Education Access and Quality

- Childhood Development
- Language and Literacy
- High School and College Education

Source: Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved October 4, 2022, from https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health.

Place and Health:

Perry County's Social Vulnerability Index

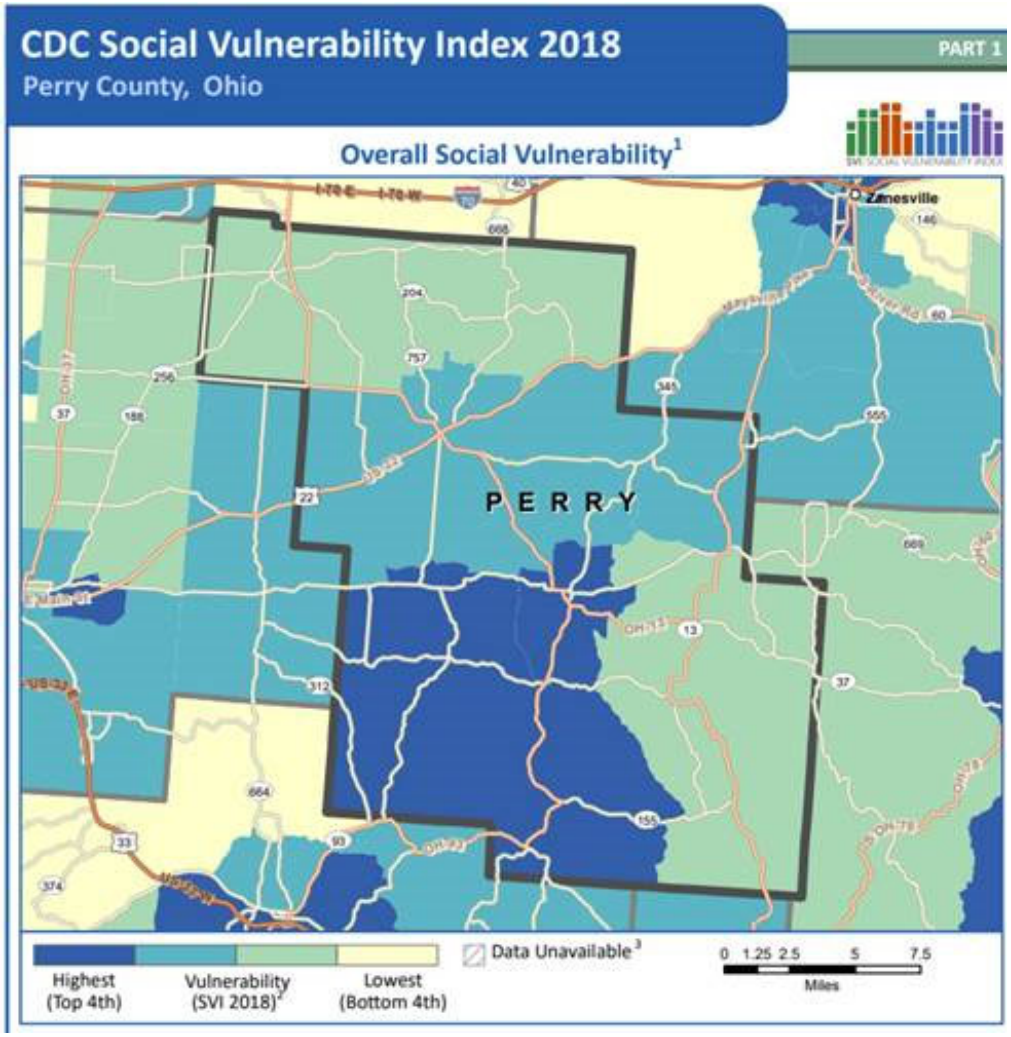
The Social Vulnerability Index is a score that compares communities by the level of impact from natural or human-caused disasters, or disease outbreaks.

The scores include **socioeconomic status**, **household composition and disability**, **race/ethnicity and language**, and **housing and transportation**. Higher scores mean greater risk.

The map of Perry County below shows the Overall Social Vulnerability scores in in Perry County.

In this map the dark blue parts of Perry County have the higher levels of social vulnerability. These areas are at greater risk for negative impacts from natural disasters or outbreaks of disease.

We can prevent human suffering and economic loss by reducing social vulnerability.



Source: CDC's Social Vulnerability Index Prepared County Maps. Retrieved October 21, 2022, from https://svi.cdc.gov/prepared-county-maps.html.

APPENDIX E

Additional Unrelated Findings

Concerns and recommendations that emerged from the focus groups but that were not directly related to the scope of the project are included below.

I. Residents would like to see more businesses in New Lexington.

- "Well, I think what's different is there's no Main Street anymore."
- "There's no brick-and-mortar places. You can't buy a pair of shoes nowhere. Our parents expressed it to their commissioners. I used to go to my budget. I said I want you guys to know. I'll just make sure they turn the mikes off but I said we are the laughingstock of all the surrounding counties. And they said what do you mean by that? Well, everybody knows that Perry Countians have to come to their counties to buy clothes and everything for their kids and everything. Our tax dollars are going to Hocking, Fairfield, etc." (lots of agreement)
- "I've complained about that for years that there's not a store or place in New Lex, and it's been that way for years."
- "The biggest thing that ruined it was when Pamida went out."
- "If the county wants to keep tax money here and keep their people here and shop here, then they've got to give us something to shop for besides groceries." (lots of head nodding)
- "It's frustrating. It's just you say, well, okay, now, for me, it's finding somebody who has the time if I want to go to Walmart or if I want to go to Lancaster to the mall or something, you know, it's not on my time doing it when I want to do it."

II. Residents feel more discipline is needed at home and in the schools.

- "Yeah, you didn't take another kid's bike. You didn't take another kid's orange off of his plate. You know now we got students in the classroom they steal the teachers' cell phones and everything else you know? That's because they're not being taught at home, that's why."
- "Well, I think that a lot of things in our schools [are] wrong. They need to be more disciplined."
- "You know, I think that there's a severe lack of discipline out there."
- "When we were kids, we all got it (spanking). If the neighbors seen you doing something, the neighbor would have done it."