

#IChampionHealth: Community Engagement Focused on Health Equity

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Background

COVID-19 disproportionately affects people of color. Ensuring accessible vaccinations and fostering vaccine confidence is imperative for safeguarding and promoting community health. Lexington, KY has one of the highest vaccination rates within the Commonwealth; however, diverse communities make up a small percentage of this count. East and west end neighborhoods experience higher rates of poverty (28-70% compared to 15.6% in Fayette County) and have higher percentages of Black (20-47.2% compared to 14.8% in Fayette County) and Hispanic (up to 30%) populations. #IChampionHealth addresses this through:

- Increasing access to essential immunizations
- Creating and disseminating culturally relevant vaccine education

#IChampionHealth

#IChampionHealth is an initiative between the University of Kentucky, Operation Making a Change, and the United Way of the Bluegrass to advance health equity and improve vaccine confidence among individuals living in low-income, diverse communities in Lexington, KY.



Project Aims

LISTEN:

Foster a culture of active listening, ensuring that community voices are heard and valued. Utilize surveys, focus groups, and community meetings to understand residents' unique health needs and concerns in low-income, diverse communities.

INFORM:

Deliver accurate health information through various channels. Staff and community members develop and disseminate culturally relevant communications, facilitate question-and-answer sessions, and engage community health champions to ensure health information reaches community members in an accessible and understandable manner.

CONNECT:

Establish and strengthen connections within the community by bringing together diverse organizations that offer accessible health and support services. This initiative looks to forge partnerships with local entities to create a network of resources that address the specific needs of underserved communities, enhancing overall community well-being.

EMPOWER:

Encourage and support informed decision-making, healthy behaviors, and advocacy efforts. Through the design and implementation of programs and events, we aim to educate and inspire community members to take an active role in their health and the health of their community.

Funding Statement

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Methods

#IChampionHealth prioritized community engagement through targeted listening sessions and innovative community boards with simple response prompts. These methods provided residents in low-income, diverse neighborhoods the opportunity to share their experiences, concerns, and aspirations regarding health and well-being.

Listening Sessions: 30 individuals participated in three listening sessions with Lexington residents from diverse neighborhoods – two at the Charles Young Center in the East End neighborhood and one at the Centro de San Juan Diego community center in the Cardinal Valley neighborhood.

Listening Boards: 5 total locations – 3 in September 2023, 1 in October 2023, and 1 in December 2023 - and included a large community festival, a small listening session at a community center, a neighborhood fall festival, a police outreach event at a large church, and a community health event at a community center.



What We Learned

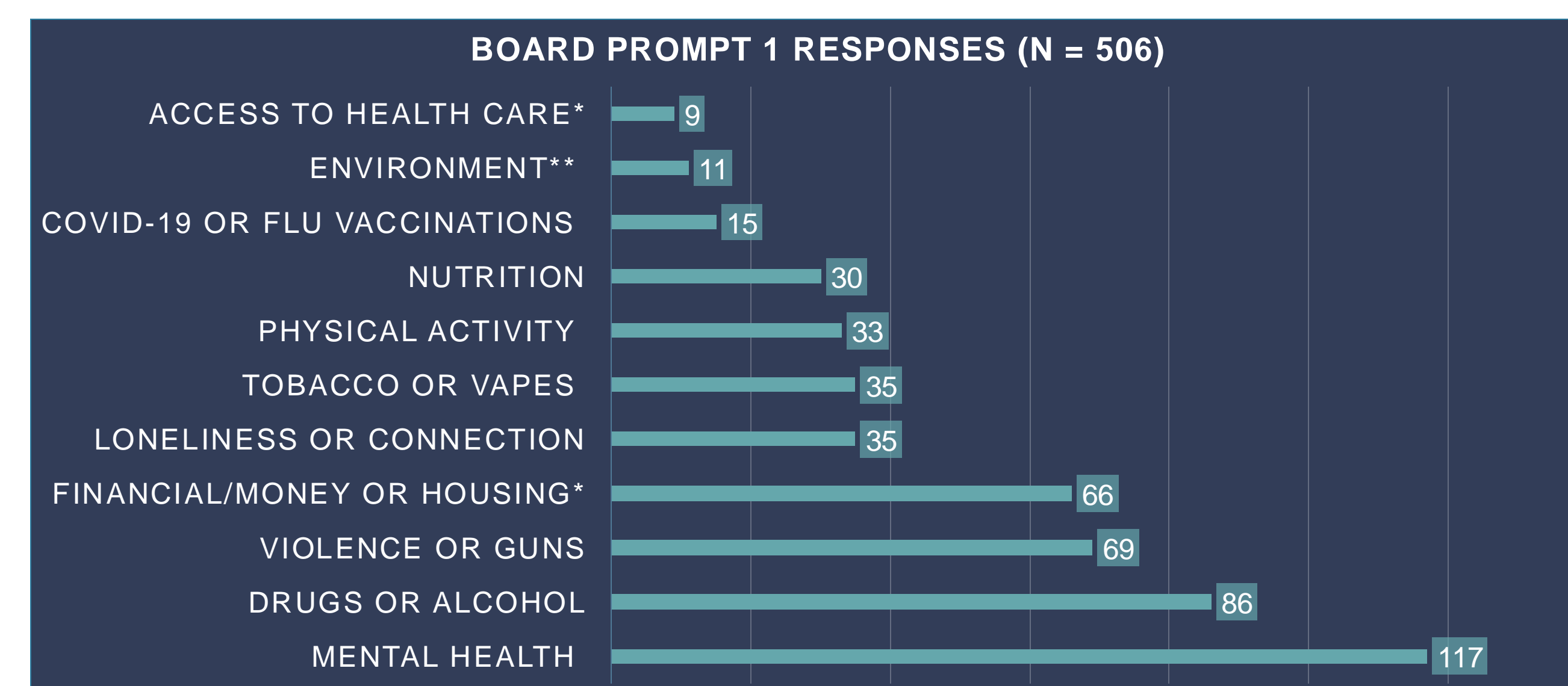
Listening sessions summary:

- Vaccines are a low health concern
- Health literacy, language, and access (location, money, time) are barriers to receiving vaccines and other healthcare
- Health concern themes included violence, basic needs, substance use/misuse, and physical health (e.g., obesity or heart disease)
- Community members trust and lean on each other – an opportunity

Listening board response summary:

Prompt	Response Totals (5 events) Sept-Dec 2023
Board Prompt 1: What do you think is the most important health issue in your neighborhood?	506
Board Prompt 2: What health resources does your neighborhood need?	110
Board Prompt 3: What do you love about your neighborhood?	129
TOTAL BOARD RESPONSES	745

Board Prompt 1: What do you think is the most important health issue in your neighborhood?



*added Housing and Access to health care options after feedback from the first event
**removed Environment option after the first event to make room for Access to health care)

What We Learned (continued)

Board Prompt 2: What health resources does your neighborhood need?

- **Basic needs** were a common theme in responses
 - Housing assistance
 - Transportation
 - Access to health care
 - Nutrition
- **Mental health resources** also emerged, including more **opportunities for connection**.
- **Environmental responses were also common but varied** based on the event location and the participants' demographics.
 - At a lower-income townhouse community, environmental responses included items such as pest control, garbage, and maintenance.
 - At a large church with more white, affluent participants, responses related to the built environment (e.g., bike paths, parks, and better signage).

Board Prompt 3: What do you love about your neighborhood?

A **strong sense of "community"** emerged from the responses – family, friends/neighbors, community organizations/resources, etc. Other notable responses included **diversity** and **peace** (both in terms of safety and activity), as well as **city parks**.

How We Applied the Community Feedback

- Made vaccines accessible and vaccine education easy to understand at events (i.e., no standalone vaccine clinics)
- Events and communications focused on the five issues: vaccines, basic needs, violence, substance use/misuse, and mental health
- Intentionally invited local, diverse community organizations already working in our neighborhoods of focus
- Ensured cultural relevance in communications, including providing English and Spanish on nearly all flyers, infographics, and posts
- Worked to leverage what people love about their communities or neighborhoods – diversity, positivity, welcoming, family-oriented, and located in the heart of the areas we are working



Conclusion

#IChampionHealth stands as a testament to the power of collaborative community engagement in fostering positive health outcomes and remains dedicated to making a tangible impact within the community. As we approach the projected end of this project, it is crucial to recognize that sustained efforts are imperative for lasting change. The **journey toward health equity** is ongoing, and #IChampionHealth encourages continued collaboration, advocacy, and community empowerment beyond the initial scope. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility, we aspire to create a legacy of improved well-being that endures long after the formal conclusion of this initiative.