# Needs Assessment

**Purpose**

This is undertaken to help build a picture of your community, identify any specific issues and priorities (both general and drug-related (including alcohol) that will contribute to informing your project of priorities and potential strategies. This should help provide direction for your Action plan.

It can also help build networks and awareness-raising of your project. It should look not just at needs and gaps but also strengths and community visions for the future. Feeding the information back to the community for discussion in a community forum/workshop and/or report will also help mobilise local community support and action on specific initiatives.

**Avoid ‘paralysis by analysis’!** You don’t need a long and technical research project detailing exact statistics on every type of drug harm; the aim is to identify the known issues that are priorities for the community and move into action on these. **It helps to have a short time limit** (e.g. 2 months).

**Step 1: Describe your local community context**

Develop a brief background history of the area and any unique or special characteristics (often included in local Council reports – ask your local librarian). Also include key demographic information (ethnicity, income, employment, education levels, (usually available from your local City/District Council or Stats NZ website.

**Step 2: Identify CAYAD specific issues and opportunities**

Using the questions below, interview your reference group (or try the *Post Box* activity with them; see next page) and other key staff in local organisations i.e. school principal/school guidance counsellor, youth and DHB public health workers, iwi services, marae, social services, police, local clubs and licensing inspectors.

*Alcohol and other drugs - key questions:*

1. **What** alcohol and other drug related harms are having the biggest impact on wellbeing in your area?
2. **Who** is being affected? Who is suffering the most harm? What is happening for more vulnerable people/communities?
3. **Why?** What local factors are contributing most to the problems?
4. **Strengths:** What local factors are protecting young people from harm from alcohol and other drugs?
5. **Policies:** Ask key organisations such as schools, marae, clubs, police, (even major employers) about their policies and practices regarding drugs and alcohol.

Include additional information/data where easily available:

* Local police data on drug and alcohol apprehensions
* Local school data on drug suspension/stand-downs, or truancy data
* Local alcohol and drug service/mental health service general information re young people seen – issues
* Recent media (over last year or so) items re important community issues relating to young people, especially with regard to alcohol and drugs
* Use national surveys to get a general indication of what percentage of people are using drugs/alcohol and levels of problems experienced but put it alongside local knowledge and issues for discussion of how it fits the local picture.

*Education, employment and recreation – key questions:*

1. **What** are the needs for young people in education, employment and recreation?
2. **Who** is most at risk of poor outcomes in education, employment or recreation?
3. **Why?** In what circumstances are they having difficulty or disengaging? What opportunities or activities are lacking?
4. **Strengths:** When are people staying engaged and succeeding? What factors are supporting them to achieve?
5. **Policies:** Ask key organisations such as local councils, iwi organisations and youth networks what policies or strategies they have to support young people to succeed.

Include additional information/data where easily available:

* Any relevant reports or plans available from local Councils, Safer Community Councils on youth strategies, employment, crime, education, or numbers of young people not in school or training.
* Stock-take of local services and amenities for young people (eg social/helping agencies, health, educational, recreation)
* Informal simple surveys at public events/shopping centres asking young people questions such as: *What do you like about living here? What’s not so good about living here? What would make it better?*

**Step 3: Deciding: What will you work on?**

Your needs assessment could find several competing issues or opportunities to be addressed. To help you and your stakeholders **decide where to begin**, you can:

1. **Ask your stakeholders which issues (and opportunities) are most important**

A short survey is a good way to ensure the priorities of each of your stakeholders are heard. List the key issues and ask your stakeholders to each rank each as high, medium or low. Repeat the exercise for the opportunities. The results can be discussed as a group.

1. **For each priority relevant to CAYAD, ask:** 
   * Will it make the community significantly **better off** (especially young and vulnerable people), if this priority is successfully addressed?
   * Is it a **high priority** for your community and stakeholders?
   * Is it **practical** to address this priority with the resources you (and your stakeholders) have?

This will help you either make a decision, or confirm that first you need to find further information about the issues raised.



**Post Box Exercise**

This tool is a creative and fast way to identify local needs and to decide on priorities:

1. Develop three to five key questions
2. Post the questions around the room or use a data projector
3. Hand each participant post it notes – one post it for each question
4. Ask them to write their answers to each question
5. Tell participants to post their answers beside each question
6. Divide participants into as many groups as there are questions
7. Participants then collate the answers and present them on a large sheet of paper in a visual format
8. Share findings with the whole group.