

Systems Strengthening Toolkit

These systems thinking and mapping tools provide opportunities to see your work in the context of the 'big picture' and strengthen collaboration with key partners.

IF YOU WANT TO...	CONSIDER...	TO HELP YOU...
Develop a shared understanding and decide on priorities for action	Iceberg Model for Systems Thinking	Develop a shared understanding of the origin of a problem by collectively identifying key events and underlying trends, structures, and mental models. Guide focus toward high leverage aspects of the system that can be prioritized for action.
	Causal Loop Diagramming	Have a facilitated conversation to share “mental models” and hypothesize as a group what’s driving trends over time. Identify leverage points that help shift the entire system and not simply treat the “symptom” of the problem.
	Ecosystem Mapping	Visualize what a well-functioning system looks like using a systems thinking framework with diverse partners.
See the 'big picture' system you are trying to change	5 R's	See the system in which you are working by using this conversation guide to prompt for what success looks like (results), roles, resources to support change, and rules and relationships that must be understood or changed to improve outcomes.
	Process Flow Diagramming	Create a map of a current process and use it to help redesign and improve the process, to create a new process, or to document the role of people/organizations to clarify who does what in the process.
	Behavior Over Time Graphs	Share perspectives about what is causing trends over time and move closer to developing a shared understanding of the challenge.
Understand the partners/ perspectives needed for an initiative	Network Mapping	Visually display connections between individuals or organizations in a system.
	Balance of Petals	Visualize the stakeholders needed for an initiative, what they need to contribute, and what value they receive in return. Through this exercise, teams discover which stakeholders are imbalanced in terms of what they give/get from a project.
Assess the services or resources available to meet a common goal	Whole System Mapping	Inventory programs, services, or resources within the system you want to strengthen.
	Asset Mapping	Map and analyze information about assets in a community or state to meet a common health goal.
Explore how individuals think about their role in a system and what they need to be successful	System Support Mapping	A deep dive mapping exercise to depict an individual's responsibilities, needs, resources, and wishes. It can be used to support meeting MCH consumers' needs, setting your team up for success, or defining and strengthening a system of individuals.

Where to start?

- Check out the System Mapping 5-minute Video Series: <https://mchwdc.unc.edu/systems-integration/>
- Reach out to the Systems Integration team at jsimon@amchp.org or klich@unc.edu

Assessments and Frameworks

(as tools for systems approaches to MCH)



TOOL/ APPROACH	HOW IT CAN WORK FOR YOU...
Consolidated Framework for Collaboration Research	Consider key constructs and community engagement strategies in creating, sustaining, funding, or assessing cross-sector collaborations
Family Engagement in Systems Assessment Tool	Self-assess the level of family engagement in policies, programs, and initiatives. This tool can be used when beginning systems-level work as a one-time assessment or as an ongoing process with follow up assessments throughout implementation.
Group Model Building	Participatory systems thinking method useful in complex systems where partners seek to develop a shared understanding of the problem and priorities for action. Group Model Building consists of a series of <u>well-documented</u> , structured group activities to build consensus.
Health Impact Assessment	Assess and inform other sectors on how a specific decision will affect the health of a population. Recommend actions other sectors can take to improve health and equity through their influence on social determinants of health.
Health in All Policies Framework	Collaborative approach to public policy that brings health perspectives and implications into other sectors' decision-making systems in order to improve population health and health equity.
Policy Engagement Framework for Public Health	Expand mindsets about ways public health and MCH practitioners can consider engaging in policy, facilitate communication and clarity around staff's role in policymaking, and guide strategic development of workforce education and training.
R4P Health Equity Framework	R4P translates complex causality into a public health equity planning, assessment, evaluation and research tool. The five components of R4P (Remove, Repair, Remediate, Restructure, and Provide) serve as a guide to identify actions needed to advance health equity.
Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being Framework	Identify levers for community change by assessing the presence of the vital conditions. Make the case for the impact of social determinants of health to broader (e.g. non-health) audiences.
Water of Systems Change	Reflect on the six conditions of systems change (policies, practices, resource flows, relationships & connections, power dynamics, and mental models) and identify strategies to shift system conditions at explicit, semi-explicit, and implicit levels of the system.

Defining Systems Terms:

- **System:** An interconnected collection of parts that interact in a meaningful, inseparable way to function as a whole and produce a set of related outcomes ([Ford, 2019; A System Dynamics Glossary](#)).
- **Mental Models:** The ideas, beliefs, and assumptions about how systems are structured and how problems within them operate. Individual and organizational mental models are our simplified understanding of how the world works that we use to guide our conversations and decisions. Systems tools allow us to make our mental models explicit, creating a starting point for discussion and collaboration ([King, 2020; Shifting My Mental Model: Systems Thinking in Action](#)).