

A decade of collaboration on valley health at HARC

Bruce Purdy, Special to The Desert Sun 4:08 p.m. PDT September 26, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy)

I have the privilege of serving as the board president of HARC, Inc. (Health Assessment and Research for Communities). This amazing organization directly supports a wide range of diverse local organizations and enables them to better serve their clients and enrich their lives. Now, as HARC celebrates its 10th anniversary, it is worth looking back on the many organizations we have partnered with over that last decade, and reflect on how we directly or indirectly continue to improve the lives of every Coachella Valley resident.

Our valley is a unique community within Riverside County. Ten years ago it was apparent that the county-level health assessment data did not meet the needs of the local service providers or tell the story of the health needs of those living in the Coachella Valley. To meet that need, HARC was formed in 2006 (initially under the umbrella of the Desert Healthcare Foundation with additional financial support from the California Wellness Foundation) to provide objective, reliable Coachella Valley-specific data.

Since then, we have worked with dozens of clients and hundreds of data users (individuals who access our data for free). Our work spans many diverse fields, but it has one common theme: improving lives. It is gratifying to think about the many lives HARC has directly or indirectly influenced over the last decade.



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The unique data we gather has enabled dozens of local organizations to raise more than \$12.8 million for critically needed programs and services, and is used by nonprofits, hospitals, agencies (in higher education, K-12 education, and government) and media organizations, among others. Our data has made it possible for our partners to provide HIV testing for everyone, meals for hungry seniors, mental health counseling for children in schools, pregnancy prevention educational programs for teens, transportation programs for people with disabilities, and much more.

HARC has served clients from coast to coast, assisting with projects big and small. We conducted a community health needs assessment of the LGBT community in the Coachella Valley to identify their needs for programs and services, which has a measurable impact on increasing awareness of HIV issues and simplified the process of getting tested for HIV infection. HARC's evaluation of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Coachella Valley's "Healthy Habits" program allowed them to demonstrate the success of their program and obtain funding to continue the program. ACT for MS had great data on hand about how their programs help people with multiple sclerosis, but did not have the expertise to turn it into actionable information until HARC analyzed it and created a report describing their program's effectiveness.

Our partner organizations also use our data to bolster their funding applications, create presentations and lectures, prioritize health needs, develop programs to address those needs, write articles, design and conduct training, and make/change policies. We are proud that our hard work has provided objective, reliable research, analysis and technical services to so many local organizations, nonprofits and Coachella Valley communities that has allowed them to facilitate better decision-making regarding health and quality of life.

I encourage you to find out more about HARC on our newly redesigned website. We are a non-profit organization and gladly accept sponsorship and donations so that we can continue to improve the quality of life for all Coachella Valley residents for many more decades to come.

Email Bruce Purdy, HARC board president, via staff@harcdata.org.

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