

Atsugi International Safe Community
On-line Assessment 30th June to 2nd of July 2021

General Comments

Atsugi Safe Community was established in 2008, achieved designation in 2010 and redesignation in 2015. Since that time Atsugi Safe Community has matured into a sustained and effective safe community program, achieving significant reductions in crime, injury morbidity and mortality.

Atsugi has also stepped up to adopt an important leadership role in the International Safe Community Network in Japan and internationally.

Three things that make Atsugi effective

1. **Sustainability:** Atsugi Safe Community has been active and successful for 12 years.
It is notable that a number of government leaders in the initial project remain involved in the program as “advisors” after they retired from their government positions. Their ongoing commitment to the project is commendable and strategic. It preserves and hands on the corporate memory of how the program works.
2. **The levels of community engagement and participation is very impressive.** The energy and commitment of community members, stakeholders and neighbourhood bodies was very evident during the on-line evaluation. This is an outstanding achievement and an important example for communities around the world.
3. **Impressive reductions in crime, suicide, traffic Injuries and child injury.** The certifying team were equally impressed by Atsugi’s strong commitment to counteract injuries in the growing elderly population. As the population is rapidly ageing in Atsugi, minimising the accelerating impact of falls in the elderly is an important strategic achievement.

Three suggestions to make Atsugi even more effective

1. **Vulnerable groups:** Indicator three has two components
 - I. **Programs that target high risk groups and environments.** The program has done an excellent job of addressing the safety needs of people, environments and issues identified as high risk by your surveillance system.
 - II. **Programs that promote safety for vulnerable groups.** Vulnerable groups (“minority groups”) within the community are typically small in number. Accordingly, injuries affecting these groups may not be obvious in the surveillance data. Specific, proactive investigations are often required to identify injury in these groups.

The communities’ efforts to identify and address the needs of abused women, men, children and seniors are highly commendable and an outstanding example to other communities in Japan and internationally. The

certifiers note that the reported incidence of these issues has increased in Atsugi but attribute this to more accurate identification and reporting.

The certifiers recommend that Atsugi make more specific enquiries into the needs of low-income groups, minority groups, people with mental illness, developmental and physical disability, religious and ethnic minorities and people whose sexual preference make them vulnerable to abuse and injury, and where necessary implement program to address their specific needs.

2. **Be curious:** Try to understand what is happening, how it is happening, and why it is happening. The better you understand why an injury occurs the better the interventions you can design.

Most surveillance systems tell you **what** happens (e.g. who gets injured) but are not as good at describing **how** they get injured, much less **why** they get injured. Identifying why a particular type of injury occurs usually requires further investigation.

The first step is to develop a more careful description of **how** a particular types of injury occurs (i.e. who, where, what, when & how). This may involve looking more carefully at your surveillance data, commissioning further local studies but also seeking out national and international research about the causes of this type of injury.

The certifiers noticed the inclusion of a “problem definition” for most of your intervention. This is strategic and important. Keep refining this skill. The more succinctly and precisely the underlying problem is described, the better your solutions and the better your evaluation.

“Begin with why”, this is the starting point for designing an intervention. Identifying the problem is important to focus your attention on **what** needs to be done (eg. *“senior citizens have a high incidence of injury due to falls”*), but describing **why** identifies the things you need to do to solve the problem (eg. *“Socially isolated senior citizens with underlying health problems have a high incidence of serious falls at home”*).

3. **Review Atsugi Safe Community governance structure.** Your outstanding success at engaging your community has changed the dynamic of how your coalition works. Initially your program was dependant on the vision of your leadership (“top down”), now that energy has been embedded in the community (“bottom up”). As the coalition is working differently now, it may be timely to review your governance structure.

You are in the best position to decide what is most appropriate for your community. However, the certifiers have a few observations that may help:

- Your current Safe Community Steering committee fulfils an important role, but arguably not the role normally attributed to a steering committee (the day the coordination of the program). It is too large (78 members) and meets too infrequently (twice a year) to accomplish this task
- Never-the-less this group fulfils an essential function, ensuring the ongoing engagement and support of key stakeholders of the program. Atsugi may wish to consider renaming this committee to more accurately reflect the strategic importance of this group (e.g. “oversight committee”).
- The certifiers observed the day-to-day leadership and coordination of the project seemed to rest with a number of key players

- The Director of the Atsugi City Safety Office
- Safe Community Advisors
- Staff of the Atsugi City Safety Office
- Chair of the Injury Surveillance Committee
- Chairs of the Task Forces
- Directors of key provincial departments (Police, Fire & Health)

If our observations are accurate, Atsugi way wish to consider formalising the implicit leadership structure that is coordinating the day-to-day operations of the program.

- A challenge for safe community governance systems across the world is the ongoing turnover of key staff. Leaders and key workers retire, are promoted, or move onto a different organisation. This dilutes the vision, commitment, knowledge and expertise of the leadership. The hard-won achievements of the Safe Community coalition are from their perspective “normal”. They may not appreciate that this success was hard won and is dependent on ongoing their commitment. Your redesignation may be a strategic opportunity to reenergise your support system.

Indicators:

1. Indicator One – Indicator Met

Strong leadership and commitment from mayor and local government. Community level programs supported by bylaws and significant incentives from local government.

Governance structure has served the coalition well but given the coalitions success in engaging community members the dynamic in the coalition has changed. It may be timely to review the governance structure in light of this changed dynamic.

2. Indicator Two – Indicator Met

Eight task forces provide comprehensive programs covering all ages and genders, based on priorities identified by injury surveillance system

3. Indicator Three – Indicator Partially Met

The application provided good evidence of programs that address the safety needs of people, environments and issues identified by their surveillance system.

The communities’ efforts to identify and address the needs of abused women, men, children and seniors are highly commended.

Injury issues relating to low-income groups, minority groups, people with mental illness, developmental and physical disability, religious and ethnic minorities and people whose sexual preference make them vulnerable to abuse and injury were not addressed in the application.

4. Indicator Four – Indicator Met

The program has demonstrated strategic use of their surveillance system to inform program design.

The application provides evidence of engagement with the health and university sector.

Evidence was provided of the taskforces accessing national injury prevention resources and policies to inform program design (especially in the domain of suicide prevention).

5. Indicator Five – Indicator Met

Excellent surveillance system, including data from community surveys and data regarding injury hospitalization. Given the difficulties Japanese communities generally have accessing hospital data, this is a strategic achievement and an important example for other communities.

Surveillance data has been disseminated strategically to inform program prioritisation and design.

6. Indicator Six – Indicator Met

The application provided evidence of ongoing evaluation of program implementation, impact (medium term) and outcome evaluation (long term) resulting in quality improvement of their programs.

7. Indicator Seven – Indicator Met

Atsugi Safe Community is heavily engaged with the Japanese and Asian Safe Communities network and provides significant leadership within the Japanese Safe Community Network. Atsugi hosted the 9th Asian Safe Communities conference in 2019.

Assessment

Based on our assessment of the documentation provided and our on-line assessment we have no hesitation in recommending Atsugi for redesignation.



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