

State Public Health System Assessment ~ Next Steps Subcommittee Recommendations June 14, 2012

Background

On September 22, 2011 the Statewide Coordinating Council for Public Health (SCC) introduced three new committees, Populations with Health Disparities, Planning and Coordination, and State Public Health System Assessment (SPHSA)-Next Steps.

Problem/Opportunity Statement

The Maine CDC engaged many public health system partners from across Maine in a State Public Health System Assessment and prioritization process in the fall of 2010. The reengagement of the partners who are also SCC members, stakeholders and interested parties is desired.

Mission

The mission of the SPHSA Subcommittee is to “identify 1-2 priorities that can be accomplished in 1 year to reengage the SCC in the State Public Health System Assessment”.

Work Performed

The SPHSA Subcommittee has held several meetings over the past nine months. The subcommittee reached out to Brenda Joly from the Muskie School at the University of Southern Maine, as well as Nancy Birkhimer from Maine CDC. The subcommittee also evaluated data from the SPHSA as well as the local public health assessments which took place in 2009. The two priorities which have been identified represent both the findings of the SPHSA and the needs of the eight public health districts in the state.

Recommendations

Priority #1

The first priority chosen is research (*EPHS #10: Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems*). Research scored the lowest in the SPHSA and thus represents the weakest part of the public health system as it looks to become certified. The following areas have been identified as ways to advance a research agenda in Maine. The SCC would not necessarily implement these strategies itself but could be a strong advocate and support for other entities as we collectively work to improve the strength of public health research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems in Maine. Maine is in a particularly disadvantaged situation with regard to public health research because the University of Maine at Orono is not well represented in public health research arenas.

Strategies for SCC Consideration

- Establish a state level peer-reviewed public health journal or collaborate with another rural state to participate in their journal (e.g. NH, VT).
- Convene and support a public health research forum. The forum should pull in members from academia and practice, and possibly take place annually. The SCC should reach out to external partners for support. The Maine Public Health Association (MPHA) and academic institutions are just two examples of possible partners.
- Advocate for national level studies to engage with local groups as field sites for best practice and other public health research. The rural nature of our state provides an excellent environment for public health studies.
- Revisit and consider adjusting the current Maine CDC requirements surrounding use of the MeCDC Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. If you are doing state funded work that has a component that necessitates IRB approval (such as a survey), the grantee/contract holder should be allowed to use any IRB, such as the IRB at the University of Southern Maine. This would reduce delays and provide for more opportunities for collaboration among non-academic organizations and academic organizations.
- Encourage more collaboration between the community-based public health practitioners and academic researchers to increase the capacity for public health research to be performed in state.

Priority #2

The second priority chosen is linkage (*EPHS 7: Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable*). Linkages to essential public health services were chosen by all eight of the public health districts during the LPHSA. This suggests that this function is one with broad support and universal applicability, thus earning prioritization.

Strategies for SCC Consideration

- The subcommittee recommends that the eight District Coordinating Councils (DCC's) define and describe linkage activities which are occurring in their districts, and reports on the responsible parties, what actions/outcomes are expected and how are linkages maintained.
- The goal is for the districts to report back on this area in the spring of 2013.
- The SPHSA Next Steps Subcommittee will draft specific guidance to aid the districts in the reporting process, and should have these completed by the December meeting of the full SCC.

For more information, please contact Steve Fox, Committee Chair, at sfox@southportland.org