



The Kansas Public Health System

The Kansas Public Health System represents a sophisticated network of state and local agencies, organizations and coalitions working to increase training opportunities for public health professionals, expand access to reliable data and deliver quality programs and services. These entities focus their efforts on issues that span the public health continuum, ranging from access to safe and affordable housing to implementation of electronic health records. While this decentralized system relies on a robust network of partnerships and assets to ensure a timely and adequate response to public health challenges, it's critical the system undergoes routine assessment to review workforce capacity and readiness, levels of collaboration and gaps in critical services and programs.

Assessing System Readiness: The Kansas Public Health System Performance Assessment

Understanding the current limitations and opportunities inherent to the Kansas public health system is critical to the successful implementation of the state's health improvement plan. To better understand the state of the current system, KDHE and seventy other system partners participated

in the National Public Health Performance Standards Program (NPHPSP) State Assessment in 2012. The NPHPSP assessment is designed to evaluate the state's current performance against a set of optimal standards. The assessment addresses the activities of all public, private and voluntary entities that contribute to the overall system. The process helps to identify strengths and weaknesses and determine opportunities for improvement.

Key Kansas public health system strengths identified through the assessment include the ability of the system to monitor health status to identify community health problems, diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards and inform, educate and empower people about health issues. Areas for improvement include assuring a competent public and personal health care workforce, evaluating effectiveness, accessibility and quality of personal and population-based health services, and research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems. For additional information about the NPHPSP and to access a copy of the Kansas report, visit the KDHE Center for Performance Management's webpage at <http://www.kdheks.gov/cpm/index.htm>.

Ensuring an Adequate and Skilled Work Force: The Kansas Public Health Workforce Assessment

Beginning in the late spring 2014, Kansas will distribute and administer a Public Health Workforce Competency Assessment which is based on the “Council on Linkages Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals.” The process will assess skills desirable for the broad practice of public health in delivery of the Essential Public Health Services. One cohort of the assessment will be the state agency staff (Kansas Department of Health and Environment), with a second cohort of all staff members of all local public health agencies. Participation will be strongly encouraged but voluntary. Results will be distributed to participating agencies and will be used by academic and practice organizations to understand, quantify, assess and respond to training and workforce needs.

Linking System Partners to Improve Health: Kansas Public Health Systems Group

The Kansas Public Health System Group (PHSG) is a committee made up of senior-level representatives from non-profit, government and academic public health organizations. The Kansas Health Foundation began convening the committee more than a decade ago to provide a forum to improve communication among the organizations. The PHSG currently works to develop, coordinate and implement an integrated strategic plan that protects and promotes the health of Kansans. Recommendations stemming from this plan are presented to the Foundation annually to guide funding for the Foundation’s Public Health Practice program (PHPP). Grants from this program support public health workforce development and projects intended to improve system capacity to achieve PHAB Accreditation.

PHSG member organizations are also organized in several strategic public health initiatives: providing recommendations related to public health workforce, data and resources to support community health assessment and public health research and practice.

Kansas Public Health Workforce Development Coordinating Council

The Kansas Public Health Workforce Development Coordinating Council was formed in October 2003 and is a collaboration of public health professionals representing local public health agencies, KDHE, Kansas Association of Local Health Departments (KALHD), Kansas Public Health Association (KPHA), University of Kansas, Kansas State University, Wichita State University and others. The work of the group has focused on assessing the professional development and training needs of the state and local public health workforce, recruiting, and developing and delivering educational



strategies to support attainment of national public health standards. The Council is tasked with recommending and implementing workforce development recommendations for the Kansas Health Foundation Public Health Practice program.

Kansas Health Matters/Kansas Partnership for Improving Community Health (Kan-PICH)

Kan-PICH began in March 2011 as a public-private partnership to explore the value of creating a central site to house critical public health data and resources. Eight agencies representing multiple sectors convened to create and provide the vision and leadership for what would become Kansas' most comprehensive online source of state-specific data and relevant health improvement resources (www.kansashealthmatters.org). As the partnership evolved and new partners were added, a strategic plan was developed, outlining new goals and objectives in the areas of governance, maintenance, sustainability, marketing and communication, and the partnership changed its name to Kansas Health Matters: A Partnership to Improve Community Health.

Nearly four years later, Kansas Health Matters is empowering communities, public health practitioners and health care providers to improve health by providing data, supporting assessment and identifying best practices through partnerships and collaboration.

Kansas Practice Based Research Network (K-PBRN)

The K-PBRN brings public health agencies together with academic research partners to identify pressing research questions of interest, design rigorous and relevant studies, execute research effectively and translate findings rapidly into practice. The network is coordinated by a



lead agency and an executive committee which includes the Kansas Association of Local Health Departments, University of Kansas, Kansas State University, KDHE, Kansas Public Health Association and Kansas Health Institute.

While the K-PBRN is relatively young, its partners have a long history of working together through multiple shared projects. The goals of the K-PBRN include:

1. Identifying practice questions of interest to members.
2. Identifying and seeking funds to answer practice questions.
3. Conducting applied research to answer practice questions.
4. Translating research into practice (through active dissemination of research findings).
5. Adopting effective evidence-based practices.
6. Linking research activities and results with other accountability, performance management and quality improvement activities.