

New Mexico Assessment Initiative

Background

Assessment is the systematic collection, assembly, analysis, and dissemination of information about the health of a community, and is one of the core functions of public health. To strengthen the nation's assessment capabilities, CDC began the **Assessment Initiative (AI)** in 1992 in partnership with various state health departments. The AI supported the development of innovative systems and methods that improve access to health data and the way data are used to inform and guide leaders involved in planning, developing, and evaluating policies and interventions to improve the health of communities. The AI supports two focus areas:

Community health assessment practices: States develop and implement tools, strategies, and approaches to improve assessment practices at local public health agencies.

Data dissemination systems: States implement interactive Web-based data query systems for user-friendly analysis and dissemination of public health data.

New Mexico — Community Health Assessment Practices

New Mexico is one of the nine states currently receiving 5-year federal funding since 2007. Its Community Health Assessment Program (CHAP) aims to strengthen assessment capacity through the following goals:

Goal 1: Improve the availability of local-level public health data to enable local entities to perform community health assessments.

New Mexico adopted Utah's Indicator Based Information System (IBIS) to provide Web-based data dissemination in its own state. Similar to Utah's IBIS, the New Mexico IBIS (NM-IBIS) is designed to be user-friendly and provide community health reports based on local health data and indicators that will significantly improve the ability of communities to make evidence-based decisions regarding local public health policy and programs. County councils now have better access to community health status information through NM-IBIS.

New Mexico is also an ethnically-diverse state with a high presence of American Indian and Hispanic populations. Hence, CHAP strives to be a cross-sector collaborative effort between the state health department, county and tribal health councils, and the University of New Mexico, among others. The state health department has begun working with the Albuquerque Area Southwest Tribal Epidemiology Center and the Navajo Nation Tribal Epidemiology Center to make data available to tribes. Tribe-specific data for some datasets are now available through a secure login on NM-IBIS.

Goal 2: Strengthen county council and tribal capacity to perform high quality community health assessments.

CHAP staff have provided in-person trainings and Web-based learning materials, and conducted presentations for state and local public health practitioners, county council, and tribe representatives on community health assessment and the Web-based data query system.

There has been an increase in collaboration between the state health department and the Indian Health Service for data exchange of vital records and mortality data in the Navajo reservation, in which a CHAP tribal epidemiologist assisted.

Goal 3: Conduct population-based assessment that is relevant to local needs.

CHAP developed county-level health profile “dashboard” type reports for public health policy and program decision-makers and local state legislators. The Community Health Highlights Reports are intended to provide easy access to community-level information about New Mexico's priority public health objectives. The frequently-accessed online report allows programs across the department to update the report as soon as new data and information become available.

Goal 4: Evaluate and sustain community health assessment practice in New Mexico.

New Mexico residents are increasing their reliance on NM-IBIS for their public health data and information as seen by the 62% increase in weekly visits to the NM-IBIS website in the 12-month period from July 2009 to July 2010 (from 190 visits per week to 302 visits per week). The University of New Mexico's Health Sciences Center is using NM-IBIS in an initiative to promote diabetes prevention activities with patients. In addition, New Mexico's Environmental Public Health Tracking Program (EPHTP) is using the NM-IBIS system as a data provider to accelerate the availability several datasets to the public, including hospital inpatient discharge, birth certificate, infant mortality, birth defects, childhood lead, cancer incidence, and drinking water data. A formal review of community health improvement plan impacts are underway, as well as research into potential avenues to support CHAP activities after funding ends.

On the Horizon

CHAP elements focus on replicability in other state and local entities outside New Mexico. The New Mexico Department of Health's data sharing agreements with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service (IHS) and the Navajo tribe can serve as models for other states working with tribes and the IHS. Both the IBIS and the EPHTP are open-source software, meaning other states could adopt these systems without licensing fees. CHAP anticipate looking for avenues to increase project sustainability and working with tribes and IHS staff to resolve and improve data access and quality issues.

Web Resources

The NM-IBIS site allows users to find health data reports and publications; access the NM-IBIS query system; and locate additional resources such as dataset-specific help, epidemiology concepts, definition of terms, and points of contact: <http://ibis.health.state.nm.us/>