

Rhode Island 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.

Rhode Island — Data Dissemination Systems

Rhode Island is one of the nine states currently receiving 5-year federal funding since 2007. Housed in the Center for Health Data and Analysis at the Rhode Island Department of Health, the goals of the Rhode Island Assessment Initiative for Data Dissemination (RI AIDD) project are as follows:

Goal 1: Implement, maintain, and update the interactive Web-based data query system (WDQS) to increase the use of data for community health assessment and evidence-based public health.

Rhode Island's WDQS currently posts eleven years of Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data (1998–2008), four years of Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data (2001, 2003, 2005, 2007) and two years of death certificate data (2004, 2005) for the state. A birth module is scheduled for posting in April 2011. Other databases will be added in phases, beginning with a census data module, while existing modules are continuously updated.

Goal 2: Offer training workshops to users on how to accurately interpret and use data for developing policy and implementing changes in health programs.

In 2006, RI AIDD partnered with the RI Public Health Institute, a non-profit public health organization housed at Brown University, to develop the *Web Access to RI Public Health Data* workshops. These workshops include a 3-hour training on how to access data, and interpret and present results of the BRFSS and YRBS WDQS modules. Since its inception, over 15 courses have been offered and over 200 public health professionals have been trained. A tutorial for the BRFSS and YRBS modules has been posted on the RI HEALTH WDQS website.

Goal 3: Build a context for sustainability through partnership with the RI Public Health Institute.

RI AIDD continues to build its partnership with the RI Public Health Institute. The Institute is currently funded by the RI Department of Health through the CDC Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant to develop community-based data collection tools (based on the BRFSS) and to collect data at the neighborhood level, focusing on lower-income, higher-minority communities of urban centers. Modeled on the *Web Access to RI Public Health Data* workshops, the RI AIDD and

the Institute recently developed and implemented the Community Health Assessment Project (CHAP). CHAP teaches key community-based service organizations to analyze community level data and make comparisons with statewide data. These analyses will be useful for setting priorities, designing community interventions, and writing grant applications. Over 40 community-based service organizations have been trained and staff continue to provide one-on-one technical assistance.

Goal 4: Disseminate findings and knowledge transfer to other states.

RI AIDD places emphasis on disseminating findings and lessons learned to regional and national audiences. Staff have presented at conferences including the Annual BRFSS, APHA, and AI conference and Brown University's Public Health Research Day. Staff also published two manuscripts on the RI WDQS' death certificate module and the evaluation of RI WDQS in 2009 and 2008 respectively, and are contributing authors in two community final reports produced by the RI Public Health Institute.

On the Horizon

Rhode Island has been able to disseminate its findings and lessons learned through scientific publications and oral presentations, as staff consist of a mix between academia and health department staff. RI AIDD's top priority remains to sustain project activities beyond the 5-year federal funding cycle.

Web Resources

Rhode Island's interactive WDQS with three current available modules: BRFSS, YRBS, and death certificate data:

<http://www.health.ri.gov/programs/assessmentinitiativefordatadissemination/index.php>