

Virginia 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.

Virginia — Community Health Assessment Practices

Virginia is one of the nine states currently receiving 5-year federal funding since 2007. The Virginia Assessment Initiative Project (VAIP) goals are as follows:

Goal 1: Implement a strategic plan for building assessment capacity within the state health department's Office of Family Health Services (OFHS).

The VAIP steering committee is working in conjunction with OFHS and the Office of Information Management data warehouse team to increase the capacity for community health assessment. Initial data collected from OFHS divisions revealed the lack of capacity for primary data collection activities. VAIP staff is currently reviewing the existing Web Based Query System (WBQS) and working on enhancing the system to meet state reporting requirements. This will include standardizing maternal and child health (MCH) surveillance and reporting across the three divisions of OFHS.

Goal 2: Load all relevant datasets into a data warehouse that facilitates ease of report building and dissemination.

Activities funded under VAIP have facilitated data linkage projects, including ad-hoc linkages of supplemental nutrition programs for women, infants, and children demographic data; Virginia Infant Screening and Infant Tracking System data and birth certificates for infants born from 2002–2010; and a maternally-linked, chronological, birth history dataset for birth events from 1990–2007.

Currently, hospital discharges, health department patient level data (Web Vision), and National Center for Health Statistics population census data are loaded and dimensionally modeled. VAIP anticipates loading all relevant OFHS datasets, including maternal and child health datasets.

Goal 3: Develop intranet/extranet reporting capabilities that will provide users easy access to maternal and child health surveillance and reporting data for community health assessments.

The VA health department data warehouse was upgraded recently to enable epidemiologists and program staff to access many of the datasets relevant to community health assessment, as well as the Geographic Information System software for Web-based interactive mapping.

On the Horizon

VAIP staff continues to work towards promoting VAIP both internally and externally to increase user awareness and proficiency with respect to maternal and child health epidemiologic surveillance and reporting. OFHS division staff are now more aware of the variety of data that are available in-house and have begun to use the data warehouse. For example, the Division of Child and Family Health has utilized the hospital patient discharge data to examine the prevalence of maternal morbidity during labor and delivery, and to determine hospital discharge rates for abortion complications and sickle cell complications. Staff have also collaborated on an online teaching module on the sources and use of community health assessment data in conjunction with the Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Family Medicine.

Web Resources

The VAIP site provides community health assessment information and data sources for VA community health assessment activities: <http://www.vahealth.org/VAIP/>

Finding and Using Data to Access Health Status in Your Clerkship Community online teaching module: <http://ess.echo360.vcu.edu:8080/ess/echo/presentation/ebae1e37-2847-414f-ad5e-f3c74ca22568>