

# National Voluntary Accreditation For Public Health Departments

## Benefits and Impact

The goal of the national accreditation program is to improve and protect the health of the public by advancing the quality and performance of public health departments. State, tribal, local and territorial health departments are eligible to apply.

Health departments participating in national, voluntary accreditation may expect benefits similar to those reported by local health departments with state-based accreditation programs.

## Improving Public Health Departments and Public Health Infrastructure

The accreditation assessment process provides valuable, measurable feedback to health departments on their strengths and areas for improvement. A local health official participating in the national Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) beta test process reported

*"Ultimately, this beta test is turning out to be an incredibly enlightening experience. Sometimes, the light is warm and welcoming, and at other times, it is bright and intrusive! No matter...that is what we need and that is what we want. The result for us will be an enhanced, more proficient public health system and a more faithful servant to our communities."*

## Strengthening Delivery of Public Health Services and Programs

Engaging in accreditation catalyzes quality and performance improvement within all public health programs and can help health departments be better prepared to proactively respond to emerging and reemerging health challenges.

A recent study in North Carolina, which has a legislatively supported accreditation program for its local health departments (LHDs), explored emergency preparedness activities in accredited and non-accredited health departments. The researchers concluded, "The preparedness and response capabilities of communities served by accredited LHDs exceed those of non-accredited LHDs," and "Accreditation improves the infrastructure which has a positive impact on emergency preparedness activities."

## Increasing Accountability and Credibility

An intended benefit of public health accreditation is momentum toward greater accountability and enhanced credibility to stakeholders, partners and communities.

This may lead to public health breakthroughs and opportunities for policy change, just as it did for a health department in Mississippi, Missouri. The health department had long sought a more rigorous food safety ordinance, but did not receive the necessary support until it received accreditation.

## Current Accreditation Activities

CDC is supporting, in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the implementation of a national voluntary accreditation program and the development of the new Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB)—a non-profit organization established in 2007 to serve as the accrediting entity.

The accreditation program is slated to be launched in 2011. Current and 2010 activities are summarized below.

- A beta test was completed in fall 2010 to evaluate all aspects of the accreditation program, including the standards, measures, documentation guidance, self-assessment and site visit process. Thirty health departments participated, representing 8 state, 19 local, and 3 tribal sites.
- A series of “think tank” meetings are occurring to explore challenging topics and engage subject matter expertise in critical areas. This input will inform the final accreditation documents and process. Think tanks are addressing areas such as laboratories, environmental health, preparedness, tribal public health, metro/large cities and governance.
- A comprehensive evaluation framework and research agenda is being developed to ensure continuous improvement opportunities for the accreditation program, as well as evidence to understand the impact of accreditation.
- Future fees and incentives for the voluntary accreditation program are being explored. Uniformly positive incentives, particularly those that can be implemented by federal agencies, such as CDC, will play a strong role in the success of accreditation.

Concurrent with PHAB activities, CDC and partners are working to ensure state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments are engaged in and aware of these efforts and are prepared to seek accreditation. Significant effort is being devoted to the development of technical assistance support and resources. Key partners include the American Public Health Association, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, National Association of County and City Health Officials, National Association of Local Boards of Health, National Indian Health Board, Public Health Foundation, and National Network of Public Health Institutes.

## CDC's Role in Accreditation

### Funding Support

CDC's Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support (OSTLTS) co-funds PHAB's accreditation activities with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. CDC also funds other key national partners to prepare health departments for accreditation by providing technical assistance, quality and performance improvement tools and training, and communications about accreditation. Further, recent CDC OSTLTS funding for “Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure to Improve Health Outcomes” is enhancing state, tribal, local and territorial agency efforts around performance management and the ability to meet national standards.

### In-Kind Support

CDC provides in-kind staff time and technical expertise to assist with the development of accreditation by contributing to PHAB work groups and committees and by soliciting subject matter expertise from across CDC. In addition, CDC co-supports the Accreditation Coalition, a collaborative of the key national organizations supporting accreditation.

### Incentives, Technical Assistance and Other Support

Incentives for participation in voluntary accreditation are critical. CDC is uniquely positioned to play a strong role in establishing financial incentives and incentives related to grants administration (i.e., streamlined reporting for accredited agencies) which have been rated of high interest. CDC can also play a major role in providing technical assistance for meeting standards and measures and improving agency and program performance.

#### For more information please contact:

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