IA Mentorship Participants

Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health (IA)

Background

State: Iowa

LHD Population Size Served: 44,151

Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected: 350

Retail Program Standards Met/Currently Working On: 3, Self-Assessment, Verification Audit

Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards: 2012

The Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health (the Department) is a LHD in north Iowa. Midway between Minneapolis, MN, and Des Moines, IA, the Department serves all 10 cities and rural areas of Cerro Gordo County, the 11th most populous county in Iowa with 44,151 constituents. Cerro Gordo County is the regional center for north central Iowa in commerce, industry, retail shopping, higher education and healthcare services. Serving both county and city residents, the Department supports and enhances sound public health infrastructure that enables delivery of high quality services and ensures capability to identify and respond to the community’s needs. The Department’s mission statement is that the Department works to optimize the health of all people in Cerro Gordo County.

Other interesting demographics include the County’s median household income estimate of $44,770, which is less than the national average and the percent of people living below the poverty level is 10.6%, which is lower than the state average. Cerro Gordo County is primarily Caucasian (95%), has a larger 65 and older population (17.9%), and is home to Mason City, a micropolitan statistical area. Serving Cerro Gordo County is a privilege for this Department.

Although the Board of Health formed decades earlier, the Department was established in 1990 with a Health Director and minimal programming including public health nursing, home care services, and limited environmental health services including retail food inspections. The State of Iowa functions as a decentralized state system where LHDs, like this Department, provide public health services in each county. The Department is founded on state government through the Iowa Administrative Code and is charged with assuring core public health functions, delivering essential public health services, and increasing the capacity of local boards of health to promote healthy people and healthy communities. This Department operates under the guidance of the Board of Health, fiscal authorization and policy resolutions of the Board of Supervisors, and the administration of the Health Director. The citizen-elected Board of Supervisors appoints members to serve on the Board of Health. The five Board of Health members are local community volunteers who are committed to delivering public health services in the community.

Overview of Mentorship Program Participation

Cerro Gordo County Department of Health participated in the NACCHO Retail Program Standards Mentorship Program as a mentee in the first cohort (2012). Cerro Gordo County Department of Health was mentored by Platte County Health Department (MO).

Mentorship Program Lessons Learned/Tips

1. Gain the support of the Board of Health or other governing body that has jurisdiction over the agency trying to develop the Standards. To implement the Standards takes significant resources; mostly dedicated staff and their time.

2. Use a step-by-step approach. To look at the Standards as a whole can be overwhelming so it is important to step back, prioritize and break apart the different components of each Standard to
make it achievable. It is important to think of the Standards as an ongoing quality improvement program, rather than just something to “check-off” the to-do list.

3. Don’t reinvent the wheel. There are other agencies that have worked through many of these Standards. Use your state and federal resources as well as other local jurisdictions in helping complete the standards.

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**Henry County Public Health (IA)**

**Background**

**State:** Iowa  
**LHD Population Size Served:** 20,145  
**Number of Retail Food Establishments Inspected:** 222  
**Retail Program Standards Met/Currently Working On:** 1, Self-Assessment  
**Enrolled in the Retail Program Standards:** 2012

Henry County is a small rural county located in the Southeast corner of Iowa. The population is approximately 20,145 with the majority located in Mount Pleasant, which is the county seat. The Henry County Public Health Department was established on December 1, 1970 under the Henry County Board of Health (HCBOH).

The Henry County Board of Health is a five-member board appointed by the Henry County Board of Supervisors. The Board of Health acts autonomously from the Board of Supervisors and is a legally recognized unit of government acting as the legal health authority for Henry County. The HCBOH has jurisdiction over the entire county area related to any public health matters and considers all towns and villages within the county boundaries to be included in the service area.

The mission of the Henry County Public Health Department is “promoting physical and mental health and preventing disease, injury and disability.” The department provides the following services operating under the Ten Essential Services: children’s health, healthy communities, immunization clinics, senior health, women’s health, worksite wellness, communicable disease follow-up, emergency preparedness, and environmental health.

The Environmental Health Program is complete and well-rounded offering essential environmental services to the residents of Henry County. Providing those services in a consistent and uniform manner has always been a priority of the HCBOH. It is frustrating that inspectors vary from county to county and no real uniformity exists. This creates confusion and disconnect with our clients that operate facilities in multi-jurisdictional areas. HCPH has partnered with 4 surrounding counties to collaborate and ensure they are all providing consistent messages during inspections in SE Iowa. Every quarter the environmental specialists meet to discuss current topics and difficult situations encountered in the field. This ensures inspectors are marking violations in the same manner and enforcement actions are consistent.
**Overview of Mentorship Program Participation**

Henry County Public Health Department participated in the NACCHO Retail Program Standards Mentorship Program as a mentee in the first cohort (2012). Henry County Public Health Department was mentored by Platte County Health Department (MO).

**Mentorship Program Lessons Learned/Tips**

Completion of the self-assessment is a starting point for your agency. This will provide a snapshot of where your agency is in the process. The Retail Program Standards are not going to be met quickly. It will require hard work and diligence by the agency. Dedication to the project and buy-in of the staff and supporting boards is key for success. Starting small and finding out where your agency is will allow quality improvement strategies to be implemented to ensure compliance with the standards in a timely manner.

As you work on the Retail Program Standards, it is important to remember if your agency does not meet the standard, mark it as such and move on. Don’t dwell on all the details of that standard. Focus on the details will evolve as a work plan is developed to tackle each individual standard. This is one area where resources were wasted as the details were confusing and caused delays.

Breaking the project down into small pieces was essential to avoid becoming overwhelmed. First, concentrate on reading and re-reading the standards themselves and the instructions that go along with them. Then focus on the assessment and worksheets one at a time.

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