

Public Health Transformation Sentinel Network

Executive Summary

Local public health systems and practices are adapting and transforming in response to forces in the field, including a changing public health workforce, continued reductions in state and local budgets, and implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). At the same time, local health departments (LHDs) are considering their unique value as both providers of safety net services and coordinators of population health efforts to improve the quality and sustainability of their community's health system. The results presented in this report highlight local conditions and LHD approaches to improving population health and advancing the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's Triple Aim, a three-dimensional approach to optimizing health system performance by enhancing the patient experience, improving the population's health, and reducing per-capita healthcare costs.

NACCHO formed the **Public Health Transformation Sentinel Network** in fall 2014 to collect information and feedback regarding the role of LHDs in the transformation of the local public health system, including implementation of the ACA. Members of the Sentinel Network are familiar with local-level ACA implementation efforts across their state or region and have general knowledge about LHDs and their roles. Sentinel Network members participate in regular surveys and conference calls designed to explore a number of ACA-related factors at the local level, including the extent of implementation, facilitators and barriers to implementation, and innovative implementation strategies.

The 2015 Sentinel Network was composed of 39 members from 28 states, recruited from a range of organizations, including state associations of local health officials, state health departments, local health departments, public health institutes, universities, and primary care associations. In January 2015, 65% of the states represented in the Sentinel Network had expanded Medicaid coverage.

Sentinel Network members were asked to complete three surveys that were developed with support from NACCHO's Research and Evaluation Team, Public Health Transformation Workgroup, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Survey topics included status of ACA implementation; LHD involvement; how LHD's promote local public health; the types of skills, knowledge, and resources LDH leaders need; exploring solutions to public health inequity; financial planning strategies and capacity building in a time of budget cuts and staff reductions; the integration of mental health care into health department services; health department/financial institution collaboration; and the messages used to make the case for the value of public health. From engaging with clinical care providers in new ways to developing coordinated care models, LHDs remain driven by their commitment to the core functions of public health to ensure that the fundamental needs of their communities are met.

The Sentinel Network's thoughtful survey answers serve as valuable guideposts to understanding how public health is being transformed today, the innovations currently being proposed – and models tested – and how LHDs can define their roles as health strategists to successfully navigate the future.

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is the voice of the approximately 2,800 LHDs across the country. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities. NACCHO provides resources to help LHD leaders develop public health systems, policies, and programs to ensure that communities have access to the vital programs and services people need to keep them protected from disease and disaster. Please contact transformation@naccho.org for further discussion or with inquiries about the Sentinel Network.