

National Voluntary Accreditation for Public Health Departments

July 2015

Overview

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support (OSTLTS) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) support the implementation of a national voluntary accreditation program for state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments. The Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), a nonprofit 501(c)3 entity, serves as the independent accrediting body. The accreditation program was developed with significant participation from national, state, tribal, and local leaders. The program launched on September 14, 2011, and the first health departments were accredited in February 2013. PHAB announces new cohorts of accredited sites each quarter.

Benefits and Impact of Accreditation

Many public service and health-related entities—such as hospitals, schools, and universities—have accreditation programs; however, until recently, there was no national accreditation program for public health departments. Accreditation by PHAB signifies that a health department is meeting national standards for ensuring that essential public health services are provided in the community.

Health departments report* that accreditation helps them—

- Better identify their strengths and weaknesses
- Document their capacity to deliver the core functions and 10 Essential Public Health Services
- Promote transparency
- Improve their management processes
- Stimulate quality improvement and performance management
- Increase their accountability to community members, stakeholders, and policy makers
- Improve their communication with the governing entity/board of health
- Be more competitive in funding opportunities

* From PHAB annual evaluation data, 2015

For more information

OSTLTS: www.cdc.gov/stltpublichealth/Accreditation/index.html

PHAB: www.phaboard.org

The goal of the national accreditation program is to protect and improve the health of the public by advancing the quality and performance of all public health departments in the country—local, state, territorial, and tribal.

"Congratulations to the health departments that have achieved this extraordinary accomplishment. Just as schools, hospitals, and law enforcement agencies do, health departments can use the accreditation process to improve services and better protect health. We look forward to the day when most people in this country are served by accredited health departments."

- Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH,
director, CDC

"Accreditation is a powerful way to publicly recognize that health departments are doing a good job, while at the same time driving them to continuously improve."

- Judith A. Monroe, MD, deputy
director, CDC, and director,
OSTLTS



What Is Happening to Support Accreditation?

- **A national accreditation program run by PHAB**—The program includes national consensus standards and a peer-review accreditation assessment process. Hundreds of health departments report they are engaged in accreditation activities, including the majority of states.
- **Technical assistance and training**—State, tribal, local, and territorial health departments are in varying stages of readiness for accreditation. Regardless of their starting point, CDC, PHAB, and other national partners are helping advance efforts and providing needed support.
- **Evaluation and research**—A comprehensive evaluation framework and active promotion of a research agenda are helping to answer the questions, “How can we improve the accreditation program?” and “What impact does the accreditation program have?” PHAB has already made improvements to the program based on user feedback. Evaluation and research data illustrate the positive impact accreditation is having.

What Should Health Departments Do?

- **Learn about accreditation**—Visit PHAB and other partner websites to learn about the accreditation standards and measures, the accreditation process, and supporting materials.
- **Prepare for accreditation**—Determine where your health department has gaps and begin to address them. Identify individuals to work on cross-department accreditation readiness efforts.
- **Celebrate and sustain your accomplishments**—If your health department is accredited, celebrate and tout this impressive achievement! Plan for reaccreditation! If you’re not yet accredited, recognize where you’re already meeting standards and highlight those successes to build enthusiasm for the next steps. Continue to improve your performance against the PHAB standards.

CDC’s Role in Accreditation

- **Funding support**—OSTLTS and RWJF co-fund PHAB’s accreditation activities. CDC supports other national partners, such as 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, National Network of Public Health Institutes, and Public Health Foundation to prepare health departments for accreditation by providing technical assistance, quality and performance improvement tools and training, and communication about accreditation.
- **Incentives and other support**—CDC is uniquely positioned to play a strong role in promoting accreditation through incentives, both financial and nonfinancial (e.g., recognition, inclusion within grant announcements). OSTLTS supports readiness through local and tribal accreditation support initiatives and opportunities to use cooperative agreement and grant funding, such as the National Public Health Improvement Initiative and the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant.
- **Staff support and CDC program connections**—CDC provides in-kind staff time and technical expertise to develop and continuously improve accreditation by contributing to PHAB think tanks and committees and by engaging subject matter experts and programs across CDC.

Questions? Contact OSTLTS accreditation staff at phaccreditation@cdc.gov.