

# The Nature of Partnerships in Local Rural Public Health Systems

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## Public Health Systems Research

- Build the scientific base of public health practice
  - improve public health infrastructure
  - ultimately enhance public health practice
- Consider connections among different entities that serve the public
- Understand the implications of their interaction

## Project Objectives

- Identify the primary partners of local rural public health agencies
- Document the extent of partners' engagement in rural public health systems
- Explore whether type of partner and nature of partnerships in rural/small town public health systems differ from those in urban/metro public health systems

## National Association of City and County Health Officials

- 2005 National Profile of Local Public Health Agencies
- Characterization of local governmental public health infrastructure and practice
- 80% response rate from local public health agencies, total 2,300 respondents
- Sub-set of local health agencies (N=83) participated in an additional questionnaire that investigated agencies' collaboration with 23 potential partners

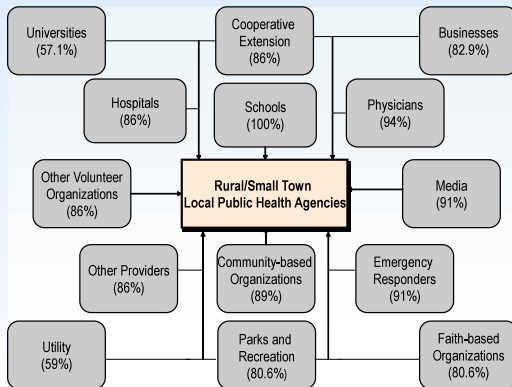


Table 1. Level of Engagement with Partners by Type of Local Public Health Agency

Partner	Rural/Small Town Local Public Health Agencies (N=35)	Urban/Metro Local Public Health Agencies (N=46)	$\chi^2$
Percentages			
<b>Physicians</b>			11.3**
No relationship	5.7	2.2	
Some relationship	88.6	63.0	
Strong relationship	5.7	34.8	
<b>Other Providers</b>			15.35***
No relationship	14.3		
Some relationship	77.1	65.2	
Strong relationship	8.6	34.8	
<b>Community Health Centers</b>			14.48**
No relationship	45.7	17.4	
Some relationship	48.6	43.5	
Strong relationship	5.7	39.1	
<b>Economic Development</b>			4.25*
No relationship	45.7	23.9	
Some relationship	54.3	76.1	
<b>Housing</b>			16.73***
No relationship	57.1	15.2	
Some relationship	42.9	82.6	
Strong relationship		2.2	
<b>Schools</b>			5.31*
Some relationship	77.1	52.2	
Strong relationship	22.9	47.8	
<b>Community-based Org</b>			7.41*
No relationship	11.4	2.2	
Some relationship	74.3	60.9	
Strong relationship	14.3	37.0	
<b>Universities</b>			6.89*
No relationship	42.9	20.0	
Some relationship	51.4	60.0	
Strong relationship	5.7	20.0	
<b>Land use</b>			5.15*
No relationship	64.7	39.1	
Some relationship	35.3	60.9	
<b>Volunteer Org</b>			6.43*
No relationship	14.3	2.2	
Some relationship	77.1	75.6	
Strong relationship	8.6	22.2	

## Findings

- Rural/small town local public health agencies collaborate less with 20 out of the 23 partners than urban/metro local public health agencies
  - Utilities and Cooperative Extension are the only partners that rural/small town local public health agencies partner with more than urban local public health agencies
  - Health professionals, such as physicians, other medical providers, and hospitals are less frequently identified as partners by rural/small town local public health agencies
- Partnerships between rural/small town local public health agencies are more likely to consist of sharing information and activities (some relationship) and less likely to be a relationship based on sharing of financial resources or leadership (strong relationship)
- The non-parametric Chi-square test revealed a significant difference between the type of local public health agency and level of engagement with 10 partners

## Discussion

- Partners and the nature of partnerships greatly differ between rural/small town public health systems and urban public health systems
- These differences are not solely a result of the partner(s) not being present in a rural community

## Conclusions

- This project expands public health systems research by documenting the constellation of partners that are involved in rural public health systems
- These findings are important for understanding how rural public health systems differ from their urban counterparts in regard to partnership involvement in local public health efforts

## Recommendations

- Improve the measurement of partnership variables to more accurately capture the depth of partnership, effectiveness of partnerships, and its influence on improving public health system's performance
- Include additional rural public health systems in research about their partners, type of relationship with partners, and partnership characteristics