

# A Method to Identify Quality Improvement Initiatives in Georgia's Multijurisdictional Public Health System

Georgia Southern University, GA Public Health PBRN, A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded Project

Kellie Penix, MS; William Livingood, PhD; Angela Peden, MPH; Nandi Marshall, MPH, CHES, DrPH(c); Lynn Woodhouse, MEd, EdD, MPH

Dayna Alexander, MSPH, CHES; Ketty Gonzalez, MD, MS; Gulzar H. Shah, PhD, MStat, MS; Russell Toal, MPH;

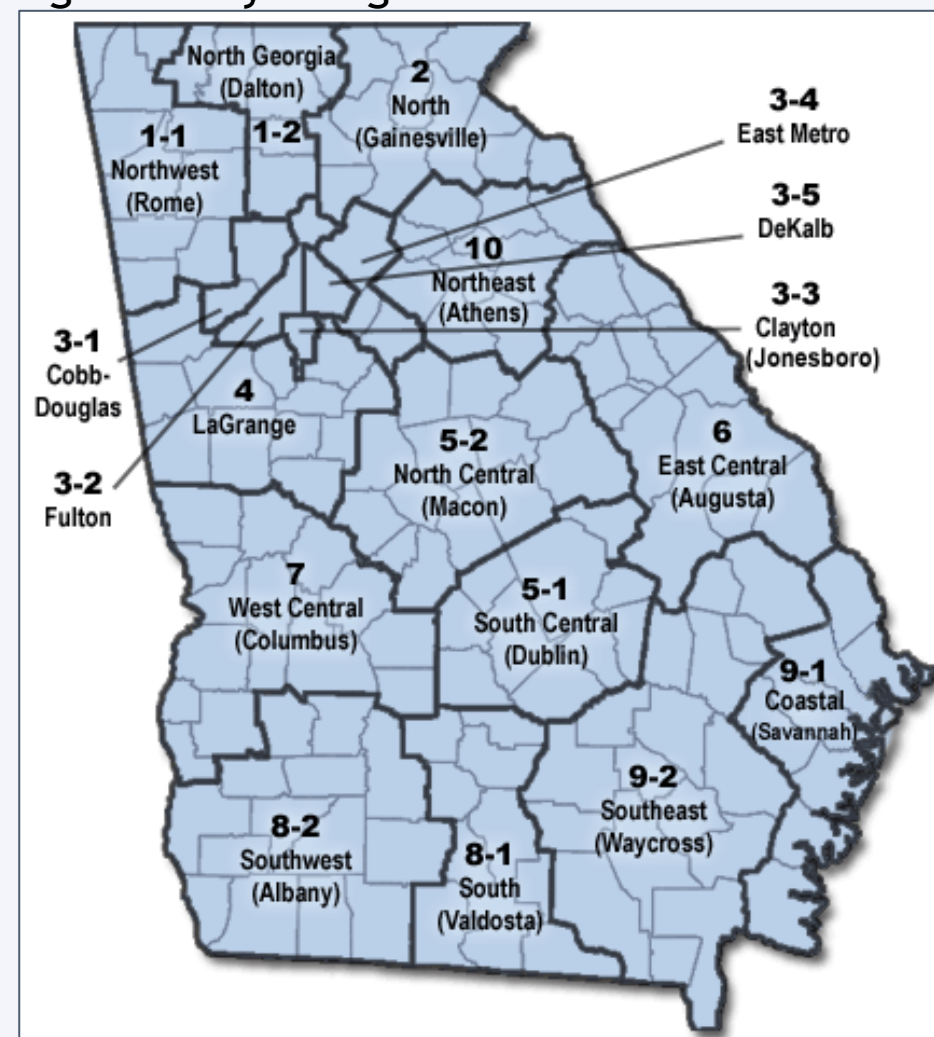


## Research Objective:

The purpose of this study was to develop and implement a process to identify quality improvement initiatives within Georgia's multijurisdictional system of Health Districts and county health departments.

## Context:

- The Georgia Department of Public Health supports 18 health districts and 159 county health departments.
- The health districts range in county composition from 1 to 16 counties in each district.
- Urban and suburban health districts in Georgia have 1 to 3 counties, whereas the more rural districts can have more than a dozen counties.
- Georgia has 159 counties; 108 counties are rural (<35,000) and 1 additional is legislatively designated as rural.



## Georgia Practice-Based Research Network (GA PH PBRN) :

- Purpose:** To improve the health of Georgia residents through a robust, collaborative, statewide practice-based public health research network.
- Partners:** Health Districts and their county health departments in southern Georgia, Georgia Southern University's Jiann Ping Hsu College of Public Health and the Center for Rural Health, Office of Public Health Practice, Georgia State Office of Rural Health, and Georgia Public Health Association.
- Research:** Examine the importance of the Georgia model of Health Districts for advancing public health quality assurance and improvement, collect base line data for the Health Districts as model of Quality Improvement Collaboratives (QICs), and engage local public health agencies in Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement.

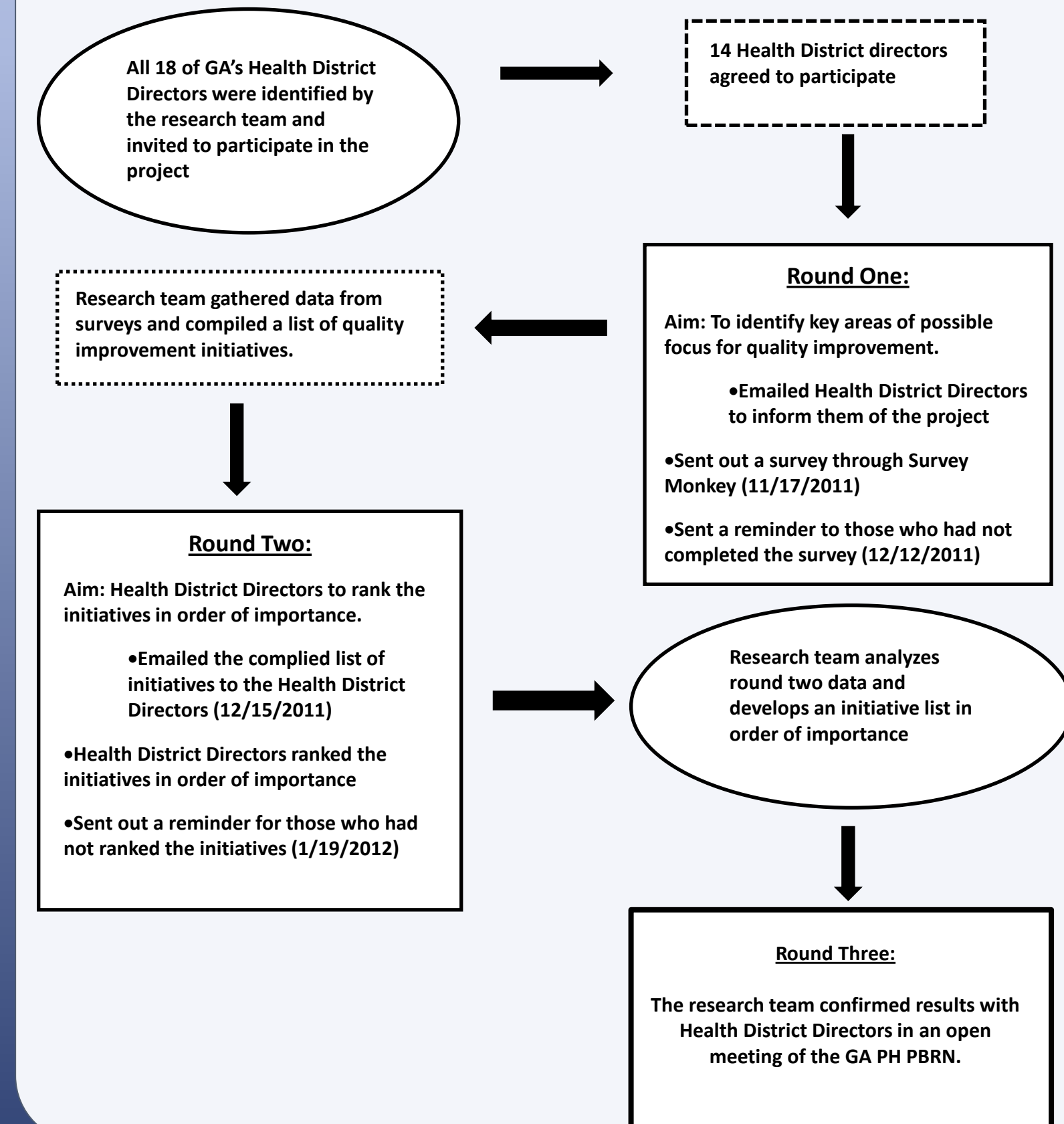
GA PH PBRN is registered with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation National Coordinating Center for Public Health Practice-Based Research Networks.

## Study Design:

The GA PH PBRN used a combination of modified web based Delphi Process in early stage and modified phone and face nominal group process in latter stage to identify and prioritize local public health quality improvement initiatives.

- All of Georgia's Health District Directors were identified by the research team and then invited to participate in a survey to identify potential areas from quality improvement.
- A survey was administered to these Health District Directors to identify their districts potential areas for quality improvement. 14 out of the 18 Health District Directors responded.
- Once the potential areas were identified, they were compiled into a list.
- This list was sent back to the Health District Directors and they were asked to prioritize by importance to their health district, the top three areas where quality improvement would be the most beneficial for their district.

## Overview of the Modified Delphi Process used in this Study<sup>2</sup>



## The Delphi Process

- The Delphi method originated in a series of studies that the RAND Corporation conducted in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup>
- This method is a technique used for the elicitation of opinions with the object of obtaining a group response of a panel of experts.<sup>4</sup>
- The Delphi process replaces direct confrontation and debate of an expert panel by carefully planning an orderly program of sequential individual interrogations usually conducted by questionnaires.<sup>4</sup>
- This series of questionnaires is interspersed with feedback derived from the respondents.<sup>3</sup>
- The objective of most Delphi applications is the reliable and creative exploration of idea or the production of suitable information for decision making.<sup>5</sup>

## Principal Findings:

The results of this three-step process were identified by the Health District directors ranking the compiled list of initiatives from one to three with one being the area most in need of quality improvement and three being the area where some quality efforts are needed.

The top four areas where quality improvement efforts would have the greatest impact:

- Accreditation capacity
- Clinical business support
- Workforce development
- Electronic health information systems

Quality Improvement Initiatives	Rank given by District Health Director
Accreditation Capacity	1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1
Workforce Development	3, 1, 3, 3, 1
Electronic Health Information Systems	3, 3, 2, 2, 2
Clinical Business Support	1, 1, 1
Health Outcomes: Infant Mortality	1, 2, 2
Clinic Operations	2, 3, 1
Emergency Preparedness Capacity	2, 2, 2
Health Outcomes: Obesity	3, 3, 3
Essential Services Capacity	3, 3
Strategic Communications	1, 2
Health Outcomes: Immunization Rates	2
Health Outcomes: Family Planning	3
Health Outcomes: Tobacco Use	
Strategic Planning Financial Reporting Compliance	

## Conclusion:

- This GA PH PBRN study enabled the local public health practice Community to identify and prioritize strategic quality improvement needs of greatest importance to the local public health community.
- The findings suggest that there are many areas where quality improvement is needed, and this participatory approach helps overcome some of the negative perceptions of quality improvement being another unfunded mandate.

## Relevance:

- This study documents the process in which multijurisdictional Health Districts can play a key role in identifying strategic initiatives for quality improvement efforts.
- This is part of an overall effort to study the process and outcomes of local public health quality improvement, which captures the engagement and ownership accrued from participatory research approaches.

## References:

- Geographic Distribution of Participating Health Districts. Copyright: Georgia Department of Public Health (2011). Counties and districts. <http://health.state.ga.us/>.
- Donaldson, A., & Finch, C. (2011). Identifying context-specific competencies required by community Australian Football sports trainers. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 1-8.
- Bown, B. (1968). *Delphi Process: A methodology used for the elicitation of opinions of experts*. ASTME Vectors.
- Okoli, C., & Pawlowski, S. (2004). The Delphi method as a research tool: an example, design considerations and applications. *Journal of Information & Management*, 15-29.
- Adler, M., & Ziglio, E. (1996). *Gazing into the Oracle: The Delphi Method and its application to social policy and public health*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

## Contact Information:

**Kellie Penix, M.S.:** Research Associate  
 The State Coordinating Center for GA Public Health PBRN  
 Phone: 912-478-2581  
 Email: kpenix@georgiasouthern.edu

**William C. Livingood, PhD:** Clinical Professor  
 Jiann Ping Hsu College of Public Health Georgia Southern University  
 Phone: 912-478-2581  
 Email: wclivingood@georgiasouthern.edu

**Angie Peden, MPH:** Research Associate and Network Coordinator  
 The State Coordinating Center for GA Public Health PBRN  
 Phone: 912-478-2581  
 Email: GAPublicHealthPBRN@georgiasouthern.edu