

Presenters: Michelle Menegay, MPH, Ashley Underwood, Scott Frank, MD, MS

Affiliation: Case Western Reserve University

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The Cost of Public Health Practice: Delivery and Cost of Core Public Health Services in Ohio



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
CASE WESTERN RESERVE
UNIVERSITY

Michelle Menegay, MPH; Ashley Underwood, BA; Scott Frank, MD, MS
Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Master of Public Health Program
Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Ohio Research Association
for Public Health Improvement
Public Health Practice-Based Research Network

Background

Purpose: Utilize an established public health PBRN to develop and implement standard methods to allow data-driven, rational decision making about the variation, value, and equity of the delivery and cost (DACs) of core public health services and foundational capabilities among Ohio Local Health Departments (LHDs).

- In 2011, the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners (AOHC) undertook an effort to build consensus within its membership around the modernization of Ohio's local public health system including financing, structure, and minimum services.
- This resulting product, the Ohio Public Health Futures Report was a direct response to the efforts of the Governor's Office of Health Transformation (OHT) to reform the local public health system, representing an endeavor by AOHC to establish a framework by which reform could take place.
- In 2012, AOHC findings were echoed by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, For the Public's Health: Investing for a Healthier Future.
- Despite efforts in Ohio and across the nation, the US public health financing system continues to be "profoundly misaligned" for health service delivery.

Methods

This project uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques, employing two separate methods of estimating the cost of providing core public health services: empirical and in-depth observational (including time and motion) studies.

- Empirical models are built using Ohio Annual Financial Report (AFR) data including expenditures, staff and service counts and will provide a sample of 125 LHDs.
- Time and motion component will draw on extensive interviewing of LHD leadership and direct observation of service activities, including counts of unit of service and time and motion of LHD personnel.
 - This direct observation will focus on trained observers conducting multiple observations across 6 structurally diverse LHDs.
- Inquiry regarding delivery of services will include examination of structure, process and outcome (Donabedian Model) offering information regarding different factors influencing quality, efficiency, value, and ultimately return on investment.

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Results

This study is expected to offer detailed information about the delivery and cost of LHD provision of:

- 1) Immunization
 - 2) Food Safety Inspection
 - 3) Tobacco Enforcement
 - 4) Epidemiologic Investigation
 - 5) Nuisance Abatement (Time and Motion)
 - Public health nuisance enforcement represents an unfunded mandate that engages LHDs both with other governmental departments and with the public.
 - Despite the centrality of this task to public health practice, there has been no formal effort to quantify, categorize, or standardize nuisance abatement efforts. Part of the dilemma may be a result of the label of nuisance, which implies a trivial scale of the problems encountered.
- Cost analysis will yield information regarding cost per unit of service, including comparison of differential costs based on jurisdictional context, and LHD process and structure. These costs will require interpretation in the context of value of the services to community health protection, promotion and improvement.
 - Across the different dimensions of the Cost of Doing Business Model, research questions will focus on core services, including type or category of service; quantity; efficiency; unit cost; value; return on investment; and outcome.
 - This project is intended to be synergistic with the other 10 Public Health PBRN Delivery and Cost Study Projects.

Conclusion

This Public Health PBRN DACs project will utilize multiple methods to examine selected Ohio core services in order to deliver actionable and timely findings to inform policy decisions regarding public health funding.

References

- Association of Ohio Health Commissioners. (2012). Public Health Futures: Considerations for a New Framework for Local Public Health in Ohio.
- Institute of Medicine. (2012). For the public's health: Investing in a healthier future, from <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2012/For-the-Publics-Health-Investing-in-a-Healthier-Future.aspx>

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