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Restructuring a State Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Program: Implications of a Local Health Department Model

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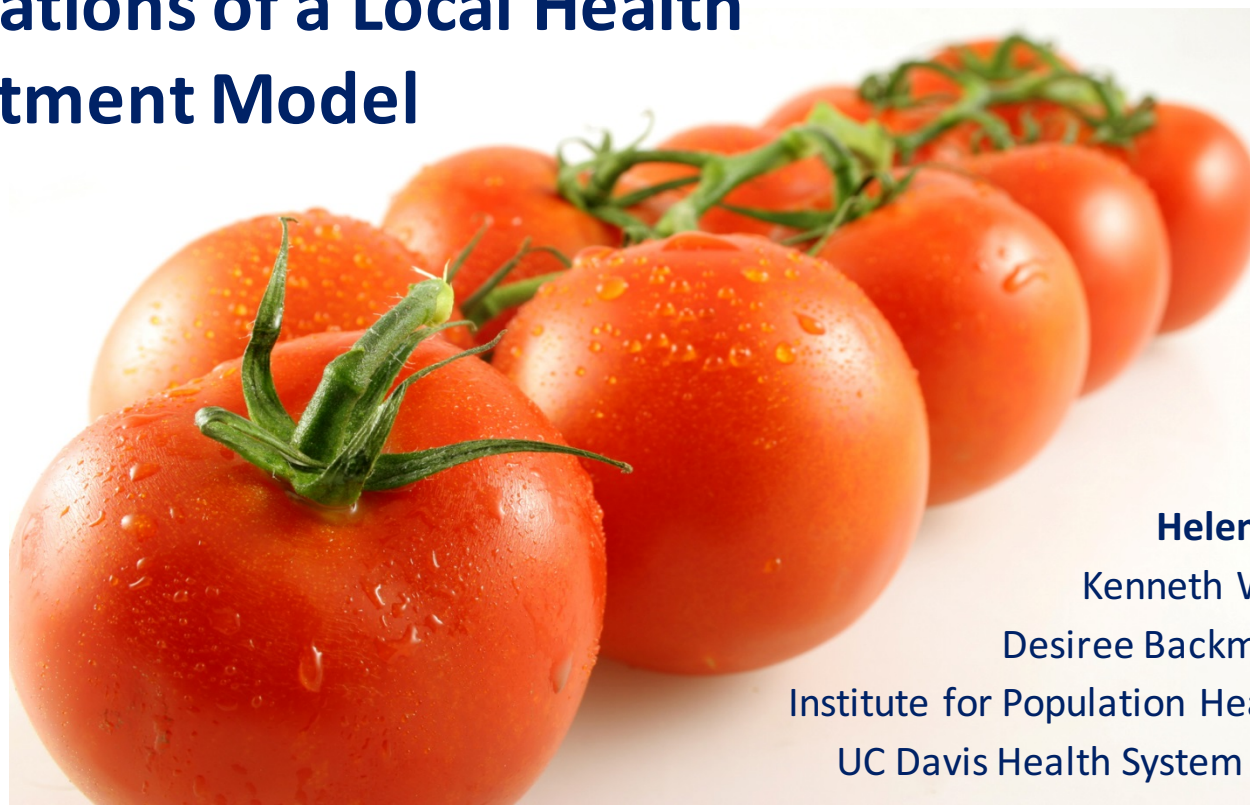
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Restructuring a State Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Program: Implications of a Local Health Department Model



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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Public Health Systems and Services Research Program

Lexington, KY | December 4, 2015

Outline

- **Background**
- Research Aims
- Framework
- Methods
- Findings
- Implications

USDA SNAP-Ed Goals



To improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will:

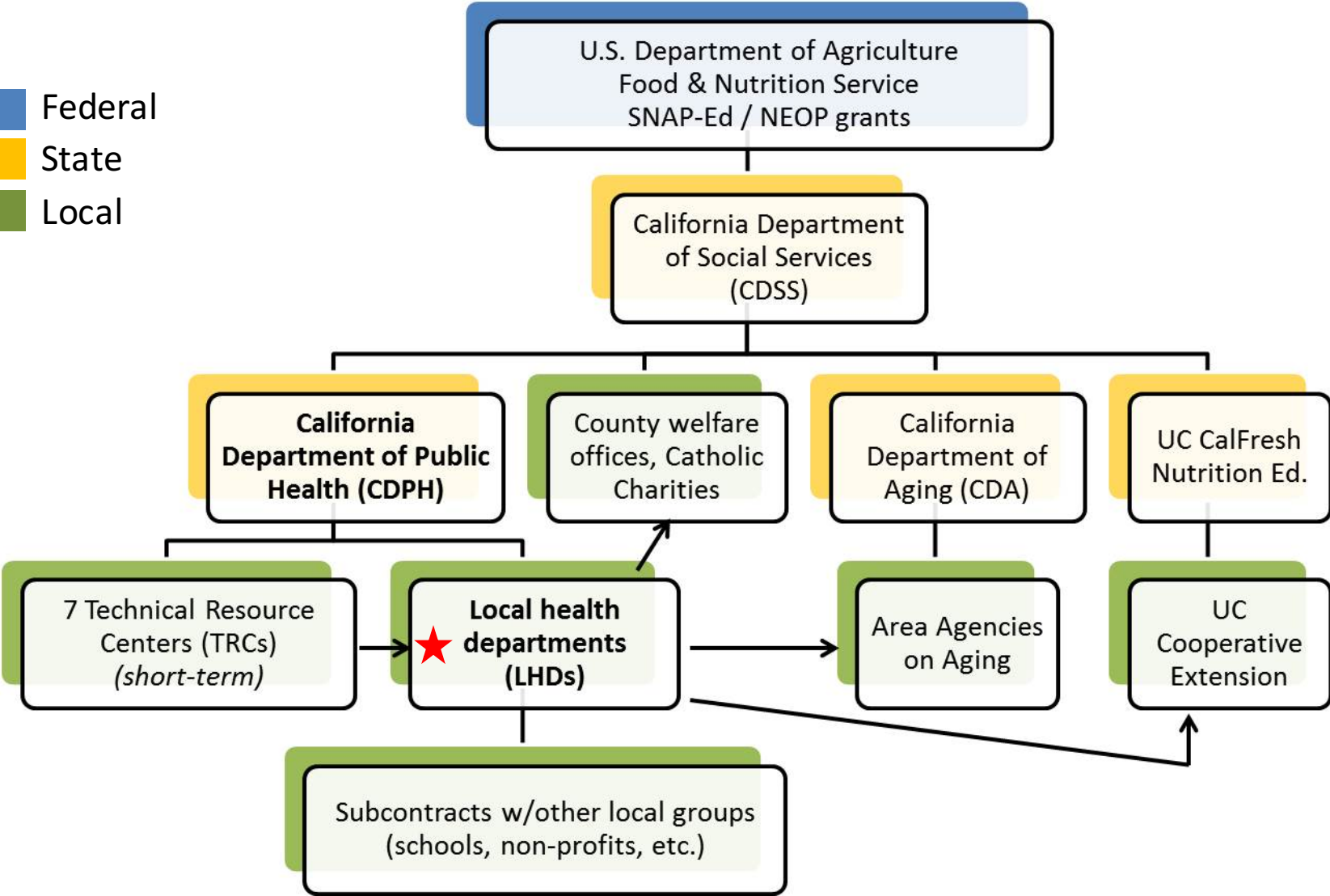
- ✓ Make healthy food choices within a limited budget
- ✓ Choose physically active lifestyles

Based on current Dietary Guidelines and MyPlate recommendations



California Has a Unique Model for SNAP-Ed

- Federal
- State
- Local



Summary of Major Changes

Federal: Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act

Match requirement replaced with grant funding

Added Policy, Systems, and Environmental Changes (PSEs)

State (California): Decentralization to LHDs (“LHD Model”)

Established LHDs as local lead agencies

New funding for some, loss for others

All counties eligible to participate

Regional networks eliminated

State role decreased

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Features of Decentralized Public Management

Feature	Advantage or disadvantage under LHD model?	Rationale
1. Coordination/communication Within local jurisdictions Between regions From local to state	Advantage Disadvantage Disadvantage	Closer to community Focused on local constituents Uncoordinated policy activity
2. Efficiency Administrative Financial Programmatic	Ambiguous Advantage Advantage	Depends on context Spending is transparent Tailored to local needs
3. Quality Innovation Skills/resources	Advantage Disadvantage	Fosters engagement, innovation Limited in small/rural areas

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Methods

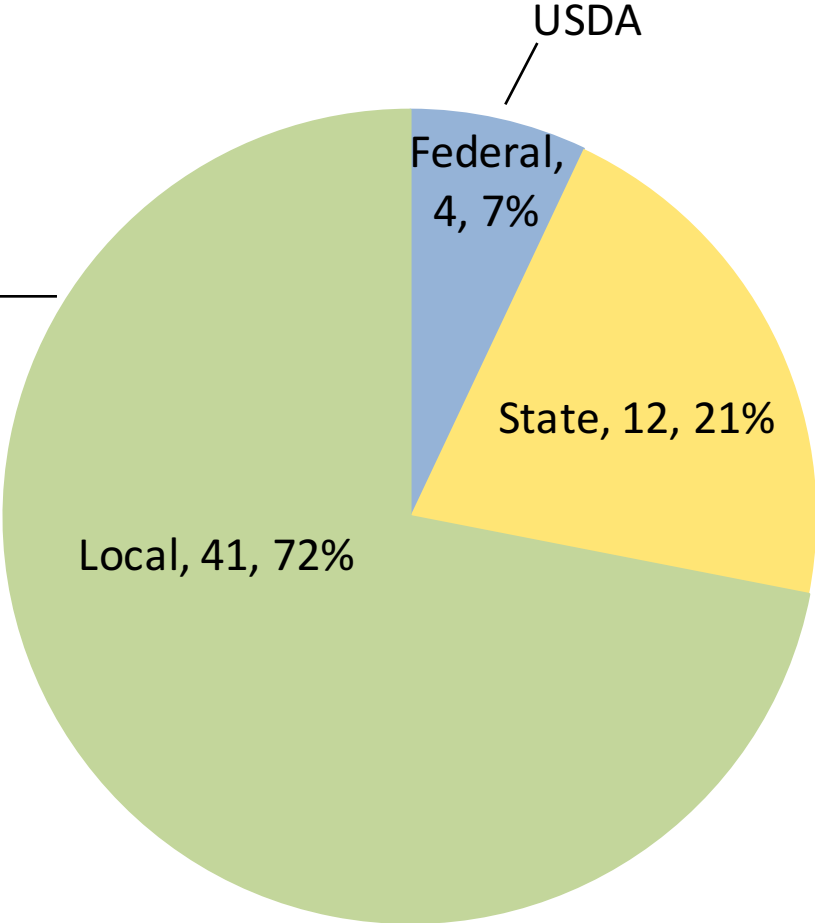
- Key informant interviews
 - Oct. 2014-Mar. 2015 (*second year of new, LHD model*)
 - Responses anonymous, audio recorded, transcribed
 - Federal, state, and local respondents
 - In-person, semi-structured format
 - Sampled until responses achieved saturation
- Qualitative content analysis using Atlas.ti
 - *A priori* themes derived from literature review
 - Supplemented with *in vivo* themes

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Key Informant Characteristics

- Focus on LHDs
- 15 LHD jurisdictions
- Other local groups, as feasible

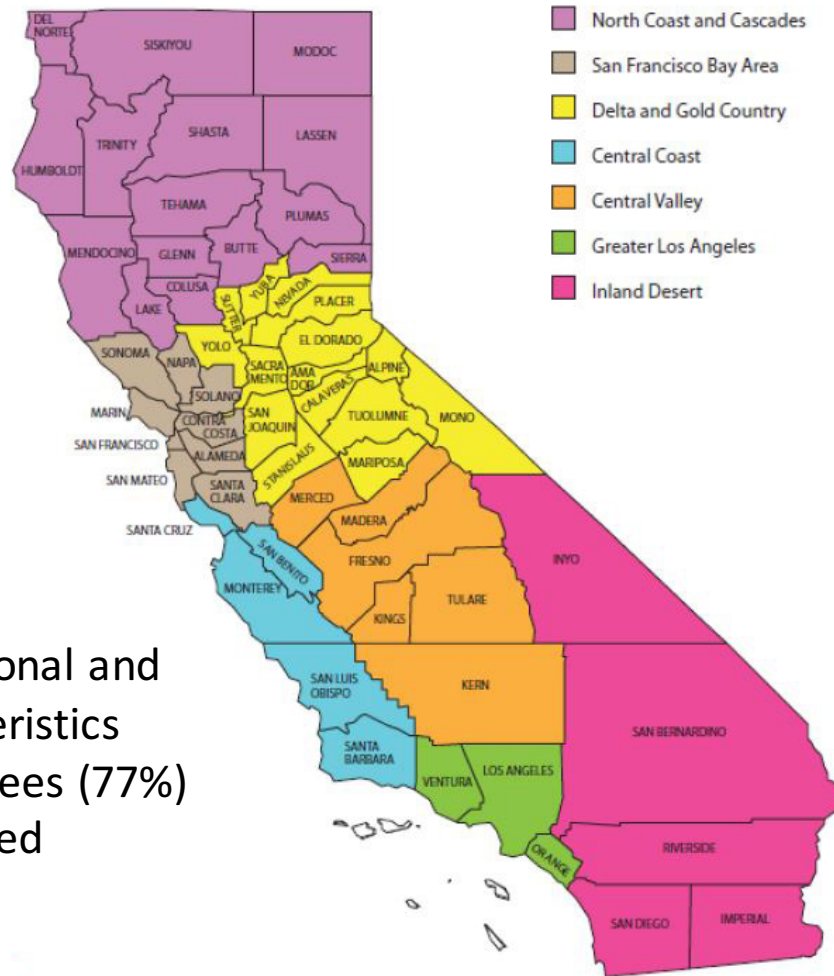


**n=57 interviewees
in 41 interviews**

- Program directors
- Agency leaders
- Admin, fiscal, program staff

All state oversight agencies

California Has Seven SNAP Regions



- Visited all 7 regions
- Variety of organizational and respondent characteristics
- Most local interviewees (77%) were very experienced

Federal, State, and Local Roles in Program Management

Level	Overall Role
Federal	Set program rules for allowable use of funds
State	Interpret and ensure compliance with federal rules Set additional state rules Provide guidance, technical assistance
Local	Select and implement activities, within local/state/federal parameters

“This is a statewide program delivered at the local level.”

Coordination/Communication – Within Local Jurisdictions

- Anticipated **advantage** under LHD model

- ✚ LHDs are well positioned to coordinate county partners

- “We’re able to encourage a certain level of coordination and collaboration ... that may not necessarily have happened if the contracts were just happening directly at the state.”*

- ✚ New coordination requirements, leadership roles created tensions

- “We were hoping that all the players could come together around specific targets for nutrition, but ... when too many players get involved, too much politics are involved too.”*

- **Advantage** achieved, but not seamless

Coordination/Communication – Across Regions

- Anticipated **disadvantage** under LHD model

- ✚ Some ad hoc communication between counties

- “We don’t connect with [other counties] as often as we have in the past, because we’re all working on our own thing, but we do still connect with them.”*

- ✚ State support for information sharing is ineffective

- “We’re talking about successes, but we’re not addressing the challenges.”*

- **Disadvantage** realized

Coordination/Communication – Between Local/State

- Anticipated **disadvantage** under LHD model

- + Less state direction enables better local customization

- “[The state] allows a lot of flexibility within the guidelines, because there’s so much diversity within the counties To prescribe a certain thing - that just would not work.”*

- Lack of a common state vision

- “Each county has a plan that’s coordinated among SNAP-Ed players in their territory, but there’s no coordination towards statewide goals.”*

- **Disadvantage** realized

Efficiency – Administrative

- **Ambiguous under LHD model**

- +**Better control and oversight of local subcontractors**

- “[LHDs] can utilize our understanding of the environment, partners, and agencies that are best suited to implement the programming, and set up the contracts with them directly.”*

- Local bureaucracy added to state and federal ones**

- “When you have a window of opportunity to hire, and then the [county hiring] freeze comes up again, it’s a catch 22.”*

- **Mixed results**

Efficiency – Fiscal

- Anticipated **advantage** under LHD model

- ✚ LHD fiscal control spurred strategic thinking

- “The LHD model and the funding structure forced us to be very thoughtful about who does what best.”*

- ✚ Fiscal management is burdensome and inflexible

- “Where [LHDs] allocate funds ... seems to be locally driven, but with all of the documentation, the flexibility isn’t there as much as you’d like.”*

- **Advantage** achieved, though with new burdens

Efficiency – Programmatic

- Anticipated **advantage** under LHD model

- ✚ LHDs understand communities, implementation issues

- “There’s a lot of state direction on what needs to be done, but what’s great is they’re leaving it up to the counties to determine how it should be done.”*

- ✚ State/federal restrictions limit local adaptation

- “It felt like a good balance, in theory, of we [the state] give you a menu of choices and you [LHD] choose the ones that will work the best for you locally, but in practice it seems like [LHDs] were getting restricted.”*

- Weak/minimal advantage achieved

Quality – Innovation

- Anticipated **advantage** under LHD model
 - + Creativity in how to make the dollars work
“We’ve learned to be creative in how to leverage our funds.”
 - State does not encourage innovative approaches
“No one wants to push the envelope, because it’s too much work. People go with what’s easiest.”
- **Advantage not achieved**

Quality – Skills/Resources

- Anticipated **disadvantage** under LHD model
 - ✚ Small/rural counties used unique organizational structures
Many of the counties in our region “have very limited capacity to implement NEOP. Those counties are really looking to us to help fill in the gaps and support them.”
 - Some LHDs not well positioned to be successful
“Some of the county public health agencies may not be able to do this. They don’t have the structure. They don’t have the support from the county.”
- **Disadvantage** realized in some LHDs, overcome in others

Conclusions

- Did not find strong evidence that a *universal* LHD model is the superior management approach for states
- Success depends on the capabilities of the organization
 - Some LHDs have been successful, others struggled
- Overall, some advantages of decentralized public management achieved, but with new problems. Some disadvantages realized, not all.
 - Federal/state program rules are key limiting factors

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Implications for Policy and Practice

- Federal changes to SNAP-Ed support a stronger public health role
 - Policy, systems, and environmental changes allowed
 - Match requirement eliminated
 - Health departments can be more involved
- Lessons for other states
 - Consider the high cost of restructuring
 - Work with organizations capable of administering complex programs
 - Try small-scale/pilot approaches first



Q & A