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Assessing Public Health Law Knowledge and Use Among the Public Health Workforce in Nebraska

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Public Health Law Research
 Making the Case for Laws that Improve Health



Background

- Public health law can be an effective and useful tool to promote population health, but also to facilitate the work of health departments.
- There is very little research regarding the awareness and knowledge of law or the conscious use of law among the public health workforce.
- Both the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and the National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO) collect information on legal counsel and services provided, but not a measure of how law is used in routine practice.

Questions from PHSSR Research Agenda

- Public Health Workforce Competencies – How do the skills and competencies of the public health workforce impact the effectiveness, efficiency, and outcomes of public health strategies delivered by this workforce?

Specific Aims

Aim 1: To systematically collect and code state and local laws in Nebraska that govern the authority of public health agencies to perform essential public health services.

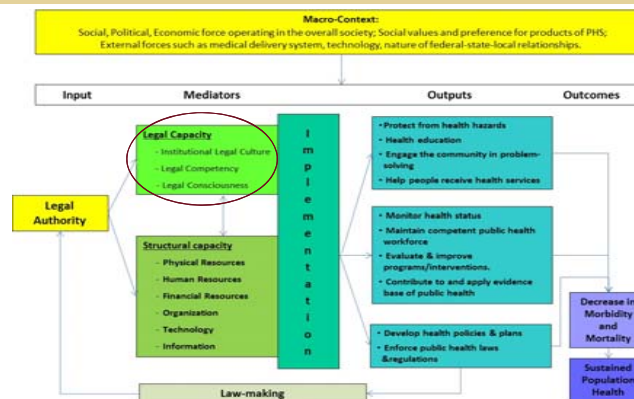


Aim 2: To create an online policy surveillance system to readily access the laws that govern public health activities in Nebraska.

Aim 3: To evaluate changes in perceptions of law and the use of law by the public health workforce in Nebraska as a result of using the online policy surveillance system.

Aim 4: To conduct an evaluation of the impact of a particular set of legal provisions on public health agency performance and population health by integrating the policy surveillance data with existing longitudinal surveillance databases.

Theoretical Framework

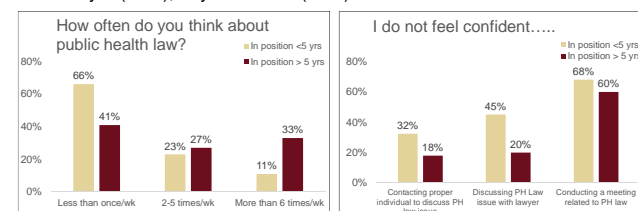


Data Collection

- In January 2015, we implemented an online survey to assess legal competency and consciousness
- The survey was sent out to approximately 1000 state and local health department officials in Nebraska, requesting anonymous participation.
- Participants were asked to provide basic demographic information, including current position, time in current position, tenure in the health department and any training in law (either formal schooling or through job-related trainings.)
- In addition, participants were also asked about:
 - Frequency of thinking about the law while performing routine duties
 - Knowledge and comfort level engaging with and discussing law
 - Areas of law which are most familiar
 - Knowledge and use of existing resources used for legal assistance
 - Needs for additional training and resources
- In July 2015, we will implement a follow-up survey to assess the impact of using the Nebraska-specific LawAtlas system to regularly access public health laws at the state and local level.
- A total of 154 individuals completed the survey (15.4% response rate).

Baseline Results

- Respondents were staff (37%), program managers (34%) or executives (11%) who worked in the health department for less than 2 yrs (26%), 3-14 yrs (26%), 15 yrs or more (27%).



- When addressing a public health law issues, respondents look up the law themselves (29%), use Google (51%), use the Department of Health website (40%) or the state legislative website (60%).
- Most frequent public health law issues addressed are alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, health professions practice, vital statistics and surveillance and chronic disease and injury.
- Requests for additional resources include: online directory of laws (84%), in-person workshops (89%) or live webinars (85%) and an online certificate program in public health law (74%)

Implications for Practice

- Public health practitioners are routinely in need of information regarding the law on various public health and health-related topics.
- Access to the law through an online system that is easy to access and easy to understand is needed.
- Increased access to the law may help public health practitioners to be more proactive and use law as a tool to assist them in implementing the essential health services.

Contact Information & Acknowledgements

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