



Issue #97

PBRN Week in Review | November 23 2011

We are Thankful for our Indefatigable PBRN Grantees, Colleagues, and Collaborators! Please circulate relevant information to network members. To request additional information or make suggestions for future items, please contact the Public Health PBRN National Coordinating Center (NCC) at publichealthpbrn@uky.edu or (859) 218-2094. Past issues are available in the [newsletter](#) archive.

Notable PBRN Activities

- **New Opportunity for Multi-PBRN Research.** The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has released a Request for Proposals (RFP) inviting Public Health PBRNs to participate in a multi-network study of practice variation in public health. The *Multi-network Practices and Outcomes Variation Study (MPROVE)* will allow participating PBRN networks to use a common research protocol and standardized data collection strategies to examine the causes and consequences of practice variation in public health. This opportunity, which is limited to primary and affiliate networks of the RWJF Public Health PBRN Program, will support up to 6 participating networks with grants of \$50,000 each to support data collection and analysis activities. An email notification with instructions on how to access the RFP and how to apply for the program was sent to the primary contact person at each PBRN on Wednesday November 2, and a conference call to discuss the RFP was held November 7. An archive of the RFP call and a list of frequently asked questions are available. **Proposal Deadline: December 7, 2011.** For more information, contact the [PBRN Coordinating Center](#).
- **Ohio PBRN Leaders hold annual Innovations Conference.** Case Western Reserve University's MPH Program, one of the sponsors of the Ohio Research Association for Public Health Improvement (RAPHI), held its annual Innovations in Population Health Conference last week, showcasing the wide array research studies, policies, and programs underway in the region to improve population health. The conference dove-tailed with several meetings to discuss the research underway through RAPHI (Ohio's Public Health PBRN), which has a broad and expanding portfolio of studies underway and in development. These studies include the network's signature work on direct observation methods used to study variation in local public health practices for food-borne illness prevention and control, a study of local variation in the enforcement of the state's clean indoor air law, a study of local variation in the responsibilities and duties of public health nurses across Ohio, a study of public health informatics capabilities in local health departments, and an emerging study to test a model for integrating public health surveillance and analytic capacity with the health information technology and care management capabilities of safety-net primary care providers. These and many other applied public health services/systems studies show that Ohio is making great progress in advancing the science of public health practice.

- **North Carolina PBRN Motivates and Disseminates with Seminar Series:** The North Carolina Public Health PBRN continued a successful seminar series it started this fall that features PBRN and PHSSR studies and seeks to draw more students, faculty, and collaborating practitioners into the research milieu. The Coordinating Center's Glen Mays joined in the November edition of the seminar series and was impressed with the level of interest and enthusiasm. "Somehow the PBRN found a way to attract some of the top scholars in public health and health services research, some of the most innovative local public health leaders anywhere, and top-notch graduate students all in one room to talk about PHSSR." Not surprisingly, this mix of knowledge and expertise is spawning innovations in practice and exciting opportunities for research, such as North Carolina's move to test new models of regionalized public health delivery. You can track the progress of the North Carolina Public Health PBRN on its [website](#).
- **Nebraska Assesses Workforce Capacity and Develops "Shortage Index":** At the November Public Health PBRN monthly virtual meeting last week, Dr. Li Wu Chen and colleagues in the Nebraska Public Health PBRN presented preliminary findings from their study of variation in local public health workforce capacities across the state. As part of this work, the network developed an innovative way of quantifying perceived workforce shortages in specific domains of public health practice, rolling these up into a "shortage index" for each domain and each local agency. An archive of this research-in-progress presentation will be available on the Public Health PBRN [website](#).
- **An Update on PHAST:** Last week Dr. Betty Bekemeier of the University of Washington and the Washington PBRN gave a webinar update on the progress of the collaborative Public Health Activities and Services Tracking (PHAST) Study. Dr. Bekemeier and colleagues have made significant strides in compiling data on local public health services from many of the states covered by Public Health PBRNs, and have started important analytic work to examine geographic variation in WIC and maternal and child health service delivery. PHAST data also exist for environmental health services, communicable disease control, oral health services, and several other domains. An archive of this webinar will be available on the Public Health PBRN [website](#). PBRNs interested in leading analyses that make use of these data are encouraged to contact Dr. Bekemeier and/or the [Coordinating Center](#).
- **Skill-Building and TA for PBRNs in Mixed Methods.** Several valuable opportunities for building research methods skills are on the horizon thanks to our partners at AcademyHealth. On Wednesday November 30 from 1-2:30PM EST, a webinar on "Introduction to Mixed Methods" will be offered free of charge to the PBRN and PHSSR community, featuring the noted health policy scholar Dr. Shoshanna Sofaer of Baruch College School of Public Affairs in New York City. As a follow-up to this webinar, Dr. Sofaer will participate in an interactive technical assistance session with the Public Health PBRNs during our regularly scheduled monthly PBRN meeting on December 15. We will discuss the recently released NIH [Best Practices on Mixed Methods](#), examine applications in PHSSR, and discuss opportunities and challenges in conducting mixed-method research through PBRNs. Please [email](#) us any questions you have about mixed methods work in your network in advance of the sessions so that we can tee up a productive discussion.
- **Skill-Building for PBRNs on Natural Experiments:** AcademyHealth has organized a webinar to provide a primer on research designs and analytic methods that are used in the

context of natural experiments to study changes in public health policies and delivery systems. This opportunity, also free, will be held December 14 from 2-3:30PM EST. This session will address basic research design principles of a natural experiment and suggestions for addressing inherent threats to validity as well as for identifying both individual and population-level measures.

➤ **Yet More Skill-Building Opportunities for PBRNs:** Yet another reason to be thankful for AcademyHealth is the new set of on-demand methods webinars that we are making available free of charge to PBRNs for a limited time only – through January 2012. The following webinars are now available from AcademyHealth – contact the [Coordinating Center](#) for information on how to access these sessions free of charge as a PBRN participant:

1. **Analysis of Social Networks (parts 2 and 3).** These sessions, from a three-part webinar series taught by Dr. Robert A Hanneman from the University of California, Riverside, will address ways in which the network perspective can inform common types of health services research. Practical guidance on the common statistical software for analyzing networks will be covered, in addition to advanced concepts that are useful for developing strategies to implement change in networks.
2. **Give Your Research a Voice: Social Media Dissemination and Knowledge.** Participants will learn how researchers can use social media to communicate their research to stakeholders—primarily policymakers and media. Austin Frakt, researcher and founder of The Incidental Economist blog, discusses the potential of blogging for dissemination and knowledge transfer. Participants will gain insight into the influence of health policy blogging, along with the pros and cons of using it as a dissemination strategy. Lou Rossiter, professor at The College of William & Mary, provides the policymaker perspective on the challenges of finding the information in a timely manner. He will share his insight on the role of social media and offer advice on how researchers can stand out in the crowd.
3. **Innovations in Health Surveys.** Panelists from the Innovations in Health Services section at the 2011 AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting (ARM) highlight their innovative methods in regard to survey research. As modern technology provides new challenges and opportunities to research subjects and access data, the panelists speak on issues such as probability sampling, mixed methods, and research to impact practice in a health care setting. Panelists include Jordon Peugh, Knowledge Networks; Trent Buskirk, St. Louis University School of Public Health; Charles DiSogra, Knowledge Networks; and Sara Singer of the Harvard School of Public Health.

➤ **Dental Researchers Examine Approaches to Disparities Research through PHSSR and PBRNs.** The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) held their annual [Fall Focused Symposium](#) in Washington earlier this month, which was dedicated to the topic of health disparities research. The Coordinating Center's Glen Mays spoke to the association about how public health delivery systems both contribute to and intervene on oral health disparities, using as an example the large geographic and rural/urban differences in the availability of oral health programs among the nation's local public health agencies. Mays noted the importance of PHSSR studies in elucidating new roles that can be played by public health systems in closing health disparities, including research underway by the Public Health PBRNs (see for example the

new RACE studies featured in last week's newsletter and below). Dialogue with officials at the National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research and the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities during a panel session highlighted ways in which dental researchers and Public Health PBRNs could engage in collaborative research to test system-level interventions for closing disparities in oral health. Collaboration between RWJF's Public Health PBRNs and the four NIDCR-funded [Dental PBRNs](#) appears particularly promising. As your PBRN expands, you may wish to consider ways of engaging oral health and public health dentistry practitioners in your research activities, and opportunities for pursuing expanded research funding through agencies such as NIDCR and NIMHHD. Contact the [PBRN Coordinating Center](#) if you are interested in participating in further conversations regarding collaborative research in oral health and dental PBRNs.

- **New Dissemination Opportunity for PHSSR:** An upcoming issue of the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* will be dedicated to advances in PHSSR, with a special focus on approaches for translating findings to policy and practice audiences. The issue, tentatively titled, "The Science of Public Health Practice: Advances in PHSSR" is being guest-edited by the PBRN Coordinating Center's Glen Mays and the National Coordinating Center for PHSSR's Doug Scutchfield. Manuscripts will be due in February 2012, with a final publication date of November 2012 to be released in conjunction with next year's APHA Annual Meeting. More information will be forthcoming, but in the meantime you may contact the [PBRN Coordinating Center](#) with questions.
- **New PBRN Dissemination Opportunity: the Public Health REACT Podcast:** As more PBRN research projects are bearing fruit, the Public Health PBRN Program is developing a new vehicle for rapidly disseminating key findings and practice implications from this research to key audiences, tentatively called the *Public Health Research-to-Action (REACT) Podcast*. Through this vehicle, the program will produce a series of fast and timely podcast interviews with PBRN networks as they are completing research projects, focusing squarely on the implications of the research for public health practice and policy decisions. NAC member and Arkansas secretary of health Dr. Paul Halverson has agreed to host this series of approximately 3-minute conversations with PBRN leaders about their research projects. Dr. Halverson will serve as an interviewer and provocateur for these sessions, driven by a few targeted questions asked by a sitting state health official. With Dr. Halverson leading the conversation, we can be sure that these sessions will emphasize brevity, clarity, and relevance to real-world public health practice and policy, particularly at state and local levels. We will disseminate the podcasts through a variety of channels, including the PBRN website, the PHSSR Youtube channel, and partnerships with key public health professional organizations. We will be contacting PBRN leaders about this opportunity in the coming weeks, but don't hesitate to contact the [Coordinating Center](#) with your ideas about this opportunity.
- **Final Push on PBRN Network Analysis Survey:** The Coordinating Center is closing out the network analysis survey of participants in the Round II and affiliate public health PBRNs. We will keep the survey open through November 30, so please encourage any PBRN members who have not yet completed the survey to do so. This survey allows us to obtain a snapshot of patterns of interaction between researchers and practitioners in the PBRNs, and will help us better understand – and ultimately improve – how the networks function as mechanisms for producing and translating evidence for practice. This survey will replicate the survey completed with Round I PBRNs in 2010. Data and findings will be shared with each participating network

to stimulate further analysis, interpretation, and brainstorming of ways to improve research production and translation processes. Contact with [PBRN Coordinating Center](#) with any needs or questions related to the survey.

- **End of Project Year Updates and Reporting:** The Coordinating Center completed its program year on October 31 and is compiling reports on the status of all PBRN research activities. Please make sure that your network has submitted any research products completed during the year via email to the [Coordinating Center](#) (manuscripts, briefs, reports, presentations, instruments, data sets, guidelines, decision aides) and also make sure to submit these to the RWJF following its submission guidelines. We will be in contact with each network this month to make sure we have the latest updates on the status of your network's projects.
- **Coordinating Center Transition to Kentucky is Complete.** The Public Health PBRN Coordinating Center has completed its transition to the University of Kentucky. Please make sure to use the email address PublicHealthPBRN@uky.edu and the telephone number **(859) 218-2094** to reach Coordinating Center staff and to send along your questions, comments, requests, ideas, updates, and products. UAMS-based program staff completed their activities under the PBRN Coordinating Center on October 31. All inquiries and correspondence regarding PBRN grants, sub-awards, and related project activities should be directed through the above communication channels at the University of Kentucky.

Related Developments in Research and Practice

- **2012 Keeneland Conference Planning:** The National Coordinating Center for Public Health Services & Systems Research (PHSSR) at the University of Kentucky is hosting the **2012 PHSSR Keeneland Conference** from April 17-19, 2012, in beautiful Lexington, Kentucky. The Call for Abstracts will close at 3 p.m. EST on Monday, January 9, 2012. Researchers, practitioners and policymakers who are interested in sharing their work during the scientific sessions should visit the conference website at www.keenelandconference.org or follow on Twitter, www.twitter.com/keenelandconf, for updates. Questions regarding submission guidelines should be sent to the national program office via email, abstracts@publichealthsystems.org or phone 859-218-2289. Confirmed speakers for the 2012 conference include: Dr. Harvey Fineberg, President, Institute of Medicine (IOM); and Dr. Thomas Frieden, Director, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Join close to 400 PHSSR colleagues to discuss the future of the nation's public health system. Previous programs, agendas and presentations are also available for download from the conference website. The Public Health PBRN Program will have its Annual Grantee Meeting on April 16-17, 2012 in conjunction with Keeneland, and its PBRN National Advisory Committee meeting on April 17.
- **AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting Accepting Abstracts:** AcademyHealth is now accepting abstracts for its 2012 Annual Research Meeting to be held in Orlando FL on June 24-26. Among the 12 research theme areas for this year's conference is "Public Health, Prevention, and Population Health Improvement." As in years past, there will also be a meeting of the Public Health Systems Research Interest Group. Abstracts are due by January 12 at 5pm EST. [More](#) information.

➤ **NIH Resources on Systems Science.** NIH's Office of Behavioral and Social Science Research continues to amass a treasure trove of resources for researchers seeking to understand and use systems science approaches in their work. Among these resources are:

1. Annual Institute on Systems Science and Health (ISSH). There is a call for applications each fall (mid-December) and a weeklong spring/summer course each year. To view ISSH materials from prior years, please click [here](#). The 2012 application site is not accepting applications just yet.
2. The archives for the wildly popular 2007 Symposia Series on System Science and Health sponsored by the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other components of NIH is available. Resources include: Systems Methodologies for Solving Real-World Problems: Applications in Public Health <http://videocast.nih.gov/launch.asp?13712>; Network Analysis: Using Connections and Structures to Understand and Change Health Behaviors, <http://videocast.nih.gov/launch.asp?13878> ; Agent Based Modeling: Population Health from the Bottom Up, <http://videocast.nih.gov/launch.asp?13931> ; System Dynamics Modeling: Population Flows, Feedback Loops and Health, <http://videocast.nih.gov/launch.asp?14005>
3. The BSSR Lecture Series, including “Harnessing Systems Science Methodologies To Inform Public Policy: System Dynamics Modeling For Obesity Policy In The Envision Network” <http://videocast.nih.gov/launch.asp?16756>

And don't forget the wonderful NIH funding opportunities available to support health research that uses system science methodologies. See the PBRN funding opportunities list archive below.

Activities on the Horizon

➤ **PH PBRN December Conference Call.** The Public Health PBRN Monthly Conference Call will be on Thursday, December 15 from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. EST. As part of the PBRN Research-in-Progress section, representatives of the North Carolina Public Health PBRN will present emerging findings from their research. Also as noted below, Dr. Shoshanna Sofaer of Baruch College School of Public Affairs in New York City will participate in an interactive technical assistance session with the Public Health PBRNs during our regularly scheduled meeting. We will discuss the recently released NIH [Best Practices on Mixed Methods](#), examine applications in PHSSR, and discuss opportunities and challenges in conducting mixed-method research through PBRNs. Please [email](#) us any questions you have about mixed methods work in your network in advance of the session so that we can tee up a productive discussion.

Research Dissemination Opportunities

➤ **Keeneland and AcademyHealth.** See the above posts for abstracts being accepted for the Keeneland Conference and the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting. These two meetings are the go-to places to discuss the production, translation, and consumption of PHSSR.

Resources in Research and Practice

REPORTS, BRIEFS AND PUBLICATIONS

- **New Issue of Leadership in Public Health Practice Showcases PBRN Work:** The new issue of *Leadership in Public Health Practice*, a journal published by the University of Illinois-Chicago School of Public Health, features six articles that describe the work of the first five public health PBRNs. The articles focus on early experiences with network development and research development, and examine the connections between public health innovation, practice-based research, and leadership. The journal's online edition should be available soon, but in the meantime contact the Coordinating Center if you would like a PDF copy.
- **State-Level Data from NACCHO's Job Losses and Program Cuts Survey Now Available.** Last month, NACCHO released a preliminary report on its Job Losses and Program Cuts Survey, demonstrating that continued budget cuts undermine the ability of LHDs to protect the health of the communities they serve. A new state-level analysis supplements the overview of findings by providing information on cuts to budgets, jobs, and programs for many states. More info is available at www.naccho.org/jobloss
- **Producing Practice-Oriented and Action-Oriented Public Health Research:** A new editorial in this month's [AJPH](#) by colleagues from the NYC Department of Health describes approaches for producing more relevant and actionable evidence for the public health practice community. The authors touch on many of the "pragmatic" research approaches currently being used in public health PBRNs, including "observational studies, the use of surveillance data for evaluation, and predictive mathematical modeling." Bravo, Big Apple colleagues.
- **Implementation and Tailoring of Obesity Prevention in WIC Clinics:** A new process evaluation by colleagues from the NY State Department of Health examines the experience of local WIC agencies in adopting and implementing a childhood obesity prevention program. The study found a high degree of fidelity in adoption, but also evidence that WIC agencies tailored implementation to client needs and local resource availability. The study appears in online first format in the journal [Health Education Research](#).

CONFERENCES

- **2012 Public Health Preparedness Summit.** [PHP Summit](#) in Anaheim, February 21-24, 2012
- **2012 PHSSR Keeneland Conference.** Lexington, April 17-19. Keeneland Conference [general information](#).
- **2012 AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting.** Orlando FL on June 24-26. Abstracts are due by January 12 at 5pm EST. [More](#) information.

Funding Opportunities and Announcements

The NCC maintains a [list of funding opportunities](#) of interest to its networks. Grant opportunities with recurring deadlines are tracked and updated.

NEW LISTINGS

- **New NSF Program on Smart Health and Wellbeing:** This new funding opportunity “seeks to address fundamental technical and scientific issues that would support much needed transformation of healthcare from reactive and hospital-centered to preventive, proactive, evidence-based, person-centered and focused on wellbeing rather than disease. The issues to be addressed include, but are not limited to, sensor technology, networking, information and machine learning technology, modeling cognitive processes, system and process modeling, and social and economic issues.” Full Proposal Deadline(s): February 06, 2012 Type I: Exploratory Projects (EXP) February 21, 2012 Type II: Integrative Projects (INT Full announcement [here](#).
- **New Opportunity for Multi-PBRN Research.** The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has released a Request for Proposals (RFP) inviting Public Health PBRNs to participate in a multi-network study of practice variation in public health. The *Multi-network Practices and Outcomes Variation Study (MPROVE)* will allow participating PBRN networks to use a common research protocol and standardized data collection strategies to examine the causes and consequences of practice variation in public health. This opportunity, which is limited to primary and affiliate networks of the RWJF Public Health PBRN Program, will support up to 6 participating networks with grants of \$50,000 each to support data collection and analysis activities. An email notification with instructions on how to access the RFP and how to apply for the program was sent to the primary contact person at each PBRN on Wednesday November 2, and a conference call to discuss the RFP was held November 7. An archive of the RFP call and a list of frequently asked questions are available. **Proposal Deadline: December 7, 2011.** For more information, contact the [PBRN Coordinating Center](#).
- **PCORI Pilots.** In an August newsletter, we mentioned that the [Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute](#) (PCORI), an independent, non-profit organization established by the ACA was soliciting comments on its initial research priorities. We noted that even with the focus on patient care, PCORI's mission of studying *prevention* and treatment options and comparing *delivery system* innovations and clinical interventions leaves the door ajar for PHSSR oriented studies. This week PCORI announced a [Pilot Projects Grant Program](#) that will be used to continue development of the research agenda. According to the news release, "With this program, PCORI is interested in the development of research methods, patient-oriented outcomes instruments, patient-provider communication and other decision-making strategies, building collaborative research teams with stakeholders, translating research findings into clinical practice, stakeholder engagement, and research agenda setting strategies that can be used in future comparative effectiveness research." Deadlines: Letter of intent-November 1; Application-December 1.
- **NIH Director's Transformative Research Awards.** This R01 from the NIH Common Fund was mentioned by Glen Mays during the September research conference. According to the announcement, "The NIH Director's Transformative Research Awards complements NIH's

traditional, investigator-initiated grant programs by supporting individual scientists or groups of scientists proposing groundbreaking, exceptionally innovative, original and/or unconventional research with the potential to create new scientific paradigms. Little or no preliminary data are expected. Projects must clearly demonstrate potential to produce a major impact in a broad area of biomedical or behavioral research." [Full Announcement](#). Application Deadline: January 12, 2012

- **NIH Systems Science and Health Research.** Proposals are being solicited from multiple NIH institutes for R01 behavioral and social science research projects, both basic and applied, that use methods of systems science (e.g. network analysis, agent-based modeling, etc) to understand complex processes that affect human health. Includes an interest in studies that elucidate the relationships between health service delivery processes and health outcomes across the entire system of care, multi-level effects of health promotion and disease prevention interventions, and mechanisms underlying health disparities. Details available in the [FOA](#) and standard application dates for R01s apply.

PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED LISTINGS

- **Predocutorial support.** A reminder to PH PBRNs with doctoral students collaborating in research projects that these students can pursue dissertation funding to support their research activities. The three biggest and best federal sources for doctoral students pursuing HSR and PHSSR research projects are [NIH NRSA awards](#)(F-31s), [AHRQ's R36 awards](#), and [NSF's Dissertation Research Improvement awards](#). And of course, the University of Kentucky National Coordinating Center for PHSSR offers [dissertation support](#) through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The eligibility criteria and deadlines vary.
- **RWJF Public Health Law Research Rapid Response Studies.** Proposals accepted online on a rolling basis. Details available in the [CFP](#).

Key Dates

Dec 15	Monthly PBRN Conference 1:00-2:30 p.m. ET (North Carolina PBRN presenting Research-in-Progress update)
April 17-19	PHSSR Keeneland Conference 2012, Lexington

