

Issue #16

## **PBRN Week in Review | May 9, 2009**

*PBRN Grantees: Please circulate relevant information to your network members. For additional information and suggestions for future items, please contact Elaine Wootten, [woottenelaine@uams.edu](mailto:woottenelaine@uams.edu) or 501-526-6628.*

### **Notable Activities This Week**

- **The May 12 PBRN Conference Call** will be devoted to an examination of practice-based research opportunities created by the public health response to the H1N1 influenza outbreak. The *RWJF Public Health Team* will join us on the call to discuss their thoughts and questions about PBRN research on this topic. Don't miss what is sure to be an interesting and enlightening conversation! National Advisory Committee members are also invited to join the call. New conference call info is included in the newsletter email.
- **Next week, the May 20 PBRN Webinar will feature Doug Wholey**, a professor of health policy and management at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. Dr. Wholey's current research touches on social network analysis methods for public health systems, theory-based sampling, mixed-method approaches, and studies of collaboration and team-based approaches in public health practice. Doug also has a wealth of experience with researcher-practitioner collaboration, both in his home state of MN where he partners with state and local health officials, and across the pond in the UK where he works closely with the National Health Service. His recent work with social network analysis in public health systems will be helpful to us as we work together to develop cross-cutting research and evaluation plans.

### **Key Upcoming Dates**

**May 12: PBRN Monthly Conference Call** -11:30-1:00 ET; 10:30 CT; 9:30 MT; 8:30 PT.

**May 12: PBRN Round II Brief Proposal Deadline** 3:00 ET

**May 20: PBRN Quarterly Webinar** - 2:00-3:30 ET; 1:00 CT; 12:00 MT; 11:00 PT.

### **Activities on the Horizon**

- *PBRNs at NACCHO.* A PBRN learning session entitled *Measuring the Value of Public Health through Practice-Based Research Networks* will be presented at the

NACCHO Annual Conference, July 29-31 in Orlando, Florida. Harold Cox (MA), Lee Thielen (CO), David Fleming (WA), and Glen Mays (NCC) invite others to join them as presenters. We will work together to flesh out the structure and content of this session during the coming months.

- **June 24-26: AHRQ Primary Care PBRN Research Conference.** This conference is heavily focused on primary care PBRNs and their research priorities, but the implications for public health PBRNs are numerous. Sharla Smith attended this conference last year and is glad to share her experiences with you. [Click here](#) for more information on the conference.
- **June 28-30: AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting in Chicago.** [www.academyhealth.org](http://www.academyhealth.org). *Registration rate increases after May 27.*
- **June 30-July 1: AcademyHealth Public Health Systems Research Interest Group Meeting, Chicago.** <http://www.academyhealth.org/interestgroups/phsr/2009.htm>

## **Related Research and Practice Activities**

- **H1N1 and Public Health Practice-based Research.** The current H1N1 influenza outbreak presents an important test of the preparedness and response capacities of our nation's public health systems. As such, the outbreak creates unique opportunities for acquiring new evidence about specific public health capacities and practices that work best in responding to a newly emerging public health threat. We already know that our nation's public health systems vary widely across states and communities with respect to their organizational capacities, workforce characteristics, financial resources, service offerings, and program operations. When these highly-varied systems are confronted with a common threat like H1N1, we have the opportunity to observe and compare how different types of systems respond and what outcomes are experienced as a result. Rigorous analysis and careful interpretation of such observations can yield valid and reliable "practice-based evidence" that elucidates pathways for improving our nation's public health systems. What are the characteristics of public health agencies and systems that experience the largest burden of H1N1 cases? Are there imbalances between the geographic distribution of H1N1 cases and the geographic distribution of public health staff and other resources? To what extent could public health resources in neighboring jurisdictions be mobilized rapidly to correct imbalances between disease burden and resources? How do characteristics of public health agencies and systems affect the timeliness of H1N1 case reporting, case investigation, case identification, and initiation of risk mitigation and control activities? How is the timeliness of outbreak response affected by differences in organizational structure, workforce and staffing patterns, financial resources, state-local administrative relationships, information and communication structures, and other key elements of public health infrastructure? We'll discuss these and other research issues at our May PBRN conference call.

- **Policy Approaches for Preventing Childhood Obesity.** This week *Leadership for Healthy Communities*, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, released a [toolkit](#) of policy approaches and resources that can help state and local policy-makers prevent childhood obesity and improve children's health. It covers a wide range of issues, including increasing access to parks and recreation centers, improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians, offering healthier foods in schools, and attracting grocery stores that provide healthy, affordable foods to lower-income communities. Each section recommends targeted strategies based on the setting, identifies key stakeholders, outlines policy and program options, provides direction on how to start programs, describes resources that can help inform the process, and includes examples of how other states and localities have achieved progress.

## Recent Literature of Interest

- **Scope and content of local public health ordinances.** Local ordinances represent one of the great unknowns in the field of public health law – wide variation in structure and content but little systematic information about the nature and consequences of this variation. A new paper by Kathy McCarty and colleagues in this month's [Public Health Reports](#) provides a detailed examination of local public health ordinances in a selection of communities around the U.S. and lays the groundwork for future studies on the design, implementation, and impact of these laws.
- **Data infrastructure for public health systems research.** Another paper in the current issue of [Public Health Reports](#), by Doug Scutchfield and colleagues, summarizes the range of existing data sources that can be used to support studies on the organization, financing, and delivery of public health services.
- **Improving public health through the healthy environments.** A recently released special supplement to the [Journal of Public Health Policy](#) examines how better environments can encourage people, especially children, to be more active on a daily basis. The supplement collects papers that were presented at a 2008 conference hosted by Active Living Research (ALR). ALR is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that builds an evidence base on the environmental and policy factors related to physical activity to inform policy. The 13 research papers in the supplement cover three broad categories: transportation, schools and youth, and built and social environments. Researchers evaluated policy interventions related to federal transportation funding and employer transit incentives, as well as the types of roads cyclists used and building designs to stimulate the use of stairs.
- **Would public health workforce attendance drop during an influenza pandemic?** This question has become significant in the recent few days. Read the [findings](#) of this British study just published in February.
- **Public health, obesity, and crime prevention?** A new study from economics and criminal justice faculty at Morehouse College uses a unique data set to examine the extent to which individual crime hazards increase with four measures of obesity.

Estimates suggest that interventions that reduce the incidence of obesity will improve public health AND public safety by reducing crime—partly through labor market effects. This study appears this month in the prestigious economics journal [Economics Letters](#).

- **Economic Value of Prevention?** A new review article by the Partnership for Prevention, commissioned by RWJF and CDC, helps to clarify the current policy debate about potential cost savings from investments in prevention – a hot button issue in federal discussions about health reform approaches. Unsustainable growth in medical spending has sparked interest in the question of whether prevention saves money and could be the answer to the health care crisis. But the question misses the point. What should matter (for both prevention and treatment services) is value – the health benefit per dollar invested. This paper discusses a package of effective preventive services that improve health at a relatively low cost. Health care spending can best be controlled by shifting investments from expensive low-value services to more cost-effective interventions. Read the full paper [here](#).
- **More on economics and public health.** This month's issue of the [Journal of Health Economics](#) contains a plethora of economic studies with public health implications, including a study examining the effects of financial incentives on vaccination coverage, the impact of tax reforms on healthy food consumption, socioeconomic disparities in obesity growth, and the effects of air pollution on infant health.

## **Funding Opportunities for Public Health Systems Research**

- **Public Health Decision-making in the Economic Downturn.** At our grantee meeting in Keeneland, participants noted the cross-cutting research question of how public health agencies make decisions about downsizing and service cuts in the midst of the economic downturn. We discovered a funding opportunity at the National Science Foundation that appears appropriate for studying this and related questions about public health policy decision-making. The ***Decision, Risk and Management Sciences program*** supports scientific research directed at increasing the understanding and effectiveness of decision making by individuals, groups, organizations, and society. Disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, doctoral dissertation research, and workshops are funded in the areas of judgment and decision making; decision analysis and decision aids; risk analysis, perception, and communication; societal and public policy decision making; management science and organizational design. The program also supports small grants that are time-critical and small grants that are high-risk and of a potentially transformative nature – such as studies of decision-making in the current economic downturn. Standard submission due dates are **August 18** each year but time-critical grants can be submitted on an ongoing basis. More info on the funding opportunity is [here](#). *Perhaps a proposal involving multiple PBRNs could be on target for this opportunity?*
- **Systems Research for Population Health:** This NIH program announcement looks particularly well suited for practice-based research in public health. *Using Systems*

*Science Methodologies to Protect and Improve Population Health (R21)*, the FOA solicits Exploratory/Developmental (R21) applications from institutions/organizations that propose to apply one or more specific system science methodologies to “policy resistant” public health problems and contribute knowledge that will enhance effective decision making around the development of and prioritization of policies, interventions, and programs to improve population health in the U.S. and abroad, especially where resources are limited and only a limited number of programs/policies/interventions can be implemented. Standard NIH submission deadlines apply. <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-08-224.html>

- **The next deadline for new applicants appears to be June 16.** Deadlines are a moving target in the world of ARRA funding, however, so the wise potential applicant would check closely!



- **Call for Proposals for Research on Public Health Law!** In the first round of funding, short-term, less-complex studies such as policy analysis or public health implications of specific laws or regulations will be funded up to \$150,000 each for up to 18 months. Complex and comprehensive legal and public health studies including long-term analyses and in-depth evaluations will be funded up to \$400,000 each for up to 30 months. The CFP and more detail about the program are available at [http://www.rwjf.org/files/applications/cfp/cfp\\_PHLR2009.pdf](http://www.rwjf.org/files/applications/cfp/cfp_PHLR2009.pdf).

**Deadline: Apply online by May 19.**

- **NIH GO Grants. *GO Grant Submission Date changed to May 29, 2009.*** “Grand Opportunities” or “GO” grants are a component of the NIH Recovery funds. GO grant opportunities of participating NIH Institutes and Centers are posted at [http://grants.nih.gov/recovery/ic\\_go.html](http://grants.nih.gov/recovery/ic_go.html)
- All the **NIH Challenge Grants** announced so far under the federal stimulus package can be found at <http://grants.nih.gov/recovery/>. Subscribe to email updates if you so desire. Individual NIH research institute web pages have more and clearer descriptions about their research priorities than does this web page. You may also want to keep an eye on the CDC, HRSA, and AHRQ web pages – and of course [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).
  - According to the most recent reports, funds in the Prevention and Wellness, Health Information Technology, and Comparative Effectiveness Research areas for which PBRNs seem especially well-suited have not been obligated.

**Next Issue:** May 15, 2009