

Issue #5

PBRN Week in Review | February 20, 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 or 501-526-6628.

Notable Activities this Week

- The quarterly *Public Health PBRN Webinar Series* kicked off on Thursday February 19 with three presenters leading the charge in developing the field of Public Health Systems and Services Research (PHSSR), the relatively new “sibling” of Health Services Research that is home to the study of practice-based research networks.

Doug Scutchfield, MD, of the University of Kentucky, gave an overview of the PHSSR field, distinguishing between the public health *department* and the public health *system* that includes “all the community organizations and agencies” and “all the public and private resources that contribute to the delivery of public health services.” Dr. Scutchfield suggested that how system performance influences community health is a key question that will receive more attention as the field advances, and he explained a Logic Model for considering the various components of and influences on the public health system. He also presented a prioritized research agenda. Dr. Scutchfield shared valuable data sources and encouraged grantees to take advantage of the technical staff and resources at the UK Center for PHSSR.

Glen Mays, PhD MPH, of the UAMS College of Public Health discussed the current state of PHSSR as a field, noting that intervention and systems research are not distinct from each other but rather move back and forth along a continuum. Dr Mays observed that good progress has been made in descriptive work of the structure of public sector/governmental organizations, though we have less evidence about financing. Great opportunities exist to explore issues related to the roles of non-governmental public health organizations, how responsibility and authority are divided between governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the consequences of those allocations. To advance the field, Dr. Mays illustrated the need to explain what goes on inside the “black box” of public health agencies and systems and the impact on service delivery and health and economic outcomes.

Tim Van Wave, DrPH, a Health Scientist in Public Health Systems Research (PHSR) within CDC’s Office of Public Health Practice, presented Federal perspectives and priorities related to the field. Dr. Van Wave touched on the PHSR role in CDC, which is to support public health systems performance improvement and to establish a focus across the agency on systems research. For one important vantage

on federal public health priorities, he recommended the October 2008 report, *Blueprint for a Healthier America: Modernizing the Federal Public Health System to Focus on Prevention and Preparedness*. He highlighted a few of its major points, including the lack of evidence that government funding for public health programs is being spent in the most effective way and the theme of linking accountability and continuous improvement with financial support. Dr. Van Wave offered several overarching research themes and gave next steps for CDC.

The PBRN Coordinating Center is grateful to our speakers and all the participants! The webinar slides will be posted at www.publichealthsystems.org/pbrn. We are sending a brief survey to get your feedback and ideas for shaping future webinars.

- ***Preventive Medicine 2009 Meeting.*** PBRN Advisory Group member Dr. Michael Caldwell (Dutchess County, NY health director), along with Drs. Hugh Tilson (UNC professor and Maine local health officer), Deborah Porterfield (UNC and Research Triangle Institute) and Glen Mays, reported an enthusiastic response to their panel session on public health systems and services research at the annual meeting of the American College of Preventive Medicine in Los Angeles, CA on February 13. The preventive medicine specialists represented at this meeting are important potential collaborators for PBRNs as they work to expand the volume, quality, and relevance of public health systems and services research. Is your network engaging preventive medicine specialists in its research development activities? You may find some eager new collaborators here.

Ongoing PBRN Activities

- A brief ***PBRN Technical Assistance Survey*** has been developed to identify information needs and areas of expertise that PBRNs would like to access during their initial phases of network development. This informational survey is designed for network leaders to complete on behalf of their network members, thereby allowing leaders to assess current capacities and needs within their network membership as a whole. Some networks may choose to disseminate the survey directly to key members of their network for completion. The survey may be completed online at <http://www.questionpro.com/akira/gateway/1153199-0-0>. This link can be forwarded to other PBRN network members as desired, and multiple responses from the same network can be submitted if desired. Questions or suggestions regarding the survey are welcome and can be directed to Sharla Smith, smithsharlaa@uams.edu or 501-526-6629. **We ask that grantees submit their responses to the survey by Friday February 27** so that responses can be summarized and disseminated back to PBRN grantees for discussion and TA planning.
- A draft document outlining ***Initial Research and Evaluation Concepts*** for the Public Health PBRN Initiative was developed and shared at the PBRN February conference call. This document describes a set of research and evaluation questions that are expected to be important to examine over the short term (1-3 years) and longer-term





(3-5 years) time horizon for the initiative. We hope this document will stimulate further thought and discussion among PBRN grantees and participants regarding what questions we want to be able to answer through the course of work on this initiative. Of particular importance, we anticipate that this document will help identify baseline information that needs to be collected from public health PBRNs early in their development (e.g. first 6 months) so that changes and progress over time can be tracked. We ask that PBRN grantees review this draft concept document and submit any questions, ideas, or concerns to the Coordinating Center by March 6 so that a broad discussion of these concepts can be conducted during the March conference call.

New in the Journals

- The March 2009 issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* contains a mini-symposium on public health systems and services research that may be of considerable interest to PBRN members. A paper by Doug Scutchfield and colleagues (University of Kentucky) reviews the literature on performance measurement in public health. Another paper by Glen Mays and colleagues (University of Arkansas) critically reviews theory and evidence regarding the organization and financing of public health delivery systems. Finally, a paper by Alice Ammerman and colleagues (UNC-Chapel Hill) examines the role of economics in public health delivery.

Activities on the Horizon

- America's Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009, generically known as "the stimulus package," passed last week and retained funding for evidence-based prevention and wellness programs. PBRNs may be well-positioned to help their affiliated public health agencies take advantage of this opportunity to enhance adoption and implementation of evidence-based public health practices. PBRNs may be equally well positioned to study the impact of stimulus funding on public health service delivery and outcomes. We will continue to monitor and discuss these types of opportunities with you.
- The agenda for the first PBRN in-person meeting on Tuesday April 7 (Lexington, KY) is actively under development. We invite your ideas regarding specific agenda items or more general topical areas to be covered during the meeting. Please send your ideas and interests to Sharla Smith, smithsharlaa@uams.edu or 501-526-6629. This meeting will be an opportunity for in-depth discussions of the strategies that grantees are using to develop their network, prioritize research interests, and plan initial research activities. Members of the PBRN National Advisory Committee will also be on hand for the discussions.

Key Upcoming Dates

March 10 – Monthly PBRN conference call, 11:30 EST, 10:30 CST, 9:30 MST, 8:30 PST.

March 13 - Deadline for registration for the *Keeneland Conference on Public Health Systems and Services Research*.

www.publichealthsystems.org/media/file/2009KCRegistrationFormPDF.pdf

April 7 - *PBRN Grantee Meeting* held in conjunction with the Keeneland Conference, Lexington KY.

April 7-9: *Keeneland Conference on Public Health Systems and Services Research*.

Lexington, KY. www.publichealthsystems.org/media/file/2009KCRegistrationFormPDF.pdf

Funding Opportunities for Public Health Systems Research

- A new National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) was announced this week. The partnership between CDC, NIH and RWJF is intended to synergize the efforts of the three organizations and have an impact on obesity more quickly by addressing the efficiency and effectiveness of obesity research. A free monthly webinar series beginning February 27 is designed to further enhance the skills of researchers in evaluating state and local policies aimed at reducing the prevalence of obesity. The website is www.nccor.org.
- The William T. Grant Foundation has issued a RFP for research “on the factors that affect policy makers’ and practitioners’ acquisition, interpretation, and use of research evidence. Grant awards ranging from \$100,000 to \$600,000 for direct and indirect costs for two to three years of work are anticipated. Interdisciplinary projects are welcome. Visit www.wtgrantfoundation.org/ for complete program guidelines.
- RWJF is developing a new program focus area on public health law that is likely to open new opportunities for research on the design, implementation, and impact of public health law and policy. We will keep you apprised of funding opportunities.
- RWJF has a newly active program to support research that evaluates the use and impact of quality improvement techniques in public health practice. The deadline for the first round of funding closed in December 2008 but we will keep you apprised of subsequent funding opportunities.
<http://www.rwjf.org/applications/solicited/cfp.jsp?ID=20581>
- A new program announcement from the National Institutes of Health looks particularly well suited for practice-based research in public health. *Using Systems Science Methodologies to Protect and Improve Population Health (R21)*. This 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/PAR-08-224.html>

Next Issue: February 27, 2009