

Issue #53

PBRN Week in Review | September 24, 2010

PBRN Grantees: Please circulate relevant information to your network members. To request additional information or make suggestions for future items, please contact the National Coordinating Center at publichealthpbrn@uams.edu or 501-551-0106. Newsletter archives are available [here](#).

Notable PBRN Activities

- ◆ **Multi-State Learning Collaborative (MLC).** Public Health PBRN representatives **Karen Hartfield (WA)**, **Robin Pendley (KY)** and **Nancy Winterbauer (FL)** presented their research for improving quality in public health practice to a standing-room-only audience attending the MLC 2010 Open Forum in Washington, D.C. last week.

Serving as moderator, Glen Mays kicked off the session by describing urgent research needs and vexing research challenges related to QI in public health practice. Research is needed not only to document the causal impact of QI processes in public health, but also to understand why QI strategies do and do not work in specific community contexts, and to examine whether the effects of QI are worth the costs they require to implement. To answer these questions, research teams must be able to deal with a host of threats to validity, including Hawthorne effects, regression to the mean, insensitive outcome measures, heterogeneous implementation processes, and many other methodological challenges. PBRNs provide valuable mechanisms for implementing comparative studies that address these issues.

Hartfield discussed three practice variation studies by the Washington PH PBRN that will drive and strengthen QI initiatives. The network conducted a real-time assessment of local health jurisdictions' preparedness and response activities during the H1N1 outbreak, examined variation across settings and used the results to make recommendations for standardized guidelines to prioritize vaccine target populations, manage and allocate vaccine, and track coverage. Hartfield also described an ongoing study of decision-making in local public health during financial crisis, particularly related to evidence-based practices, and an early study of practice variation in approaches to communicable disease investigation. Hartfield's presentation illustrated the roles that practice variation studies can play in elucidating opportunities and targets for QI in public health.

Pendley focused on Kentucky's Research Implementation Award project to evaluate implementation of QI strategies related to diabetes self-management (DSM) in six Kentucky LHDs that collaborate in regional diabetes centers of excellence. The study is examining factors that influence the adoption and implementation of evidence-based DSM strategies and whether the QI strategies deployed by LHDs lead to systems changes and process improvements in DSM.

Winterbauer gave an overview of the Florida research network and stressed the importance of institutional and community contexts in implementing QI research and practice. Strengths of the Florida PBRN include a quasi-decentralized system organized around 67 county health departments, an effective SACCHO, and sound research partners in academic health departments. She discussed results from a variety of practice-based studies conducted at the Duval County Health Department, including social marketing, customer and employee satisfaction, and an RWJF-funded evaluation of the implementation of QI in immunizations. Together, these studies highlight the importance of context in agency transformation from conducting “little qi” to conducting “big QI”. Winterbauer noted that research conducted to date, although important, has “understudied” the attributes of change in public health settings. She pointed to the promise and potential for PBRNs to examine organizational readiness to implement initiatives, such as QI and accreditation, using the agency as the unit of analysis.

In her keynote address earlier in the day, **RWJF President and CEO Risa Lavizzo-Mourey** spoke enthusiastically about the work of Public Health PBRNs and their role in filling the void of relevant and useful evidence about public health practice. The meeting was the Collaborative’s final open forum, culminating five years of work in QI and accreditation.

✦ **2010 Public Health PBRN Research Implementation Awards (RIA).** Round II PBRNs are developing research proposals on the theme of measuring and improving quality in public health practice in response to the RWJF limited competition RFP for 2010 RIAs. This supplemental award of up to \$150,000 offers funded PBRNs the opportunity to pursue large-scale studies over 18 to 24 months, in addition to the smaller projects conducted with initial grants.

Proposals. Projects must have two components: a *measure development and testing* component that involves specifying, validating, and testing measures of quality in public health practice settings and a *comparative analysis* component that examines variation in the tested measures across organizations and practice settings over time.

Research Interests. Networks have expressed interest in studying quality measures related to:

- ◆ LHD performance in identifying and tracking children with elevated blood lead levels;
- ◆ a natural experiment involving development of an integrated HIV and STD field services model where two separate approaches now exist;
- ◆ definition, development and implementation of QI measures for LHDs in rural contexts;
- ◆ LHD use of health information technology, health information exchange, and/or data from electronic health records;
- ◆ factors that have moved LHDs from plan development to implementation/action of state-mandated community health improvement plans;
- ◆ measures of emergency response activities and capacity; and
- ◆ development/validation of a mix of new and existing quality measures across settings around a core public health activity derived from evidence-based practice using the LA County model.

Technical Assistance. In preparing their proposals, applicant PBRNs may access up to three days of technical assistance in developing the research plans. Researchers with expertise in the topics above or the theme of measuring and improving quality in public health practice and who are interested in serving as technical consultants may contact the National Coordinating Center by [email](#).

Deadline: Proposals are due in the RWJF electronic system by Friday, October 15, 6:00 pm ET.

Activities on the Horizon

- **Collaboration to Measure LHD Services.** Public Health PBRNs interested in working together to develop research on measuring LHD services will meet on October 21 and 22 in Little Rock. Enthusiasm for a multi-network approach to the topic is evident, with 19 participants of 11 PBRNs planning to attend. Meeting objectives are to: 1) identify shared/similar variables related to LHD practice and programs being collected within states; 2) establish criteria for choosing similar practice-related variables to collect, compile, and examine against related outcomes; 3) discuss opportunities for collecting similar/same data and for sharing best data collection strategies and instruments; 4) identify issues for study leaders to consider as the project moves forward; 5) determine individual network interest in and the level of commitment to this multi-network study; and 6) establish a preliminary research team. To learn more about this meeting contact the NCC at publichealthpbrn@uams.edu.
- **PBRN Publication.** A reminder to Round I Public Health PBRNs that a ten-page, double-spaced manuscript for the *Leadership in Public Health* journal article is due to the National Coordinating Center on **Friday, November 12**, the same week as the APHA annual meeting. The Coordinating Center will combine the submissions into one manuscript and edit for consistency before forwarding to the journal editor.
- **Research Methods Skill-Building.** Because of the interest and enthusiasm for the research courses piloted with the Public Health PBRNs earlier this year, the Coordinating Center and AcademyHealth are working together to make additional skill-building opportunities available to networks. Details to come!
- **Public Health Association of Nebraska (PHAN).** **Dave Palm and Li-Wu Chen of Nebraska PH PBRN** will present a session on the network's development and research at the PHAN annual conference in Kearney on September 30. They will share some preliminary results from a survey of Nebraska LHD directors on workforce issues, the first of two workforce surveys planned for this year.
- **Washington State Public Health Conference.** **Karen Hartfield, Hanne Thiede, Betty Bekemeier, and Anthony Chen** will present a 90-minute session entitled "Practice-Based Research Networks: The Washington State Experience" on October 11 at the Washington State Joint Conference on Health in Yakima.

Save the Date!

- **RWJF Reception at APHA.** Save the date of Monday, November 8, for the RWJF Public Health Reception at the Colorado Convention Center in Korbel Ballroom 4. The Public Health team invites grantees to drop by for refreshments and networking between 6 and 8 pm.
- **American Public Health Association (APHA).** The following abstracts from PBRN representatives have been accepted for presentation at APHA:

List Updated

- ◆ "Communication Capacity during the Outbreak of Novel Influenza H1N1: An Evaluation of Health Departments in a Public Health Practice-Based Research Network" **Robin Pendley (KY PH PBRN)**
- ◆ "Resource Allocation and Funding Challenges for Regional Local Health Departments in Nebraska" **Li-Wu Chen and Dave Palm (NE PH PBRN)**

- ◆ “Effectiveness and Challenges of Regional Community Health Planning Partnerships in Nebraska” **Li-Wu Chen and Dave Palm (NE PH PBRN)**
 - ◆ "Local Public Health Leadership and Community Efforts to Obtain ARRA Stimulus Funding" **Bill Livingood (FL PH PBRN)**
 - ◆ "Formative Evaluation Results for a Local Public Health QI initiative to Improve Immunization Rates" **Bill Livingood (FL PH PBRN)**
 - ◆ "A Participatory Approach to Planning for Regional Public Health Services in Massachusetts" **Justeen Hyde (MA PH PBRN)**
 - ◆ "Changes in Public Health Programs over Time...and How They Relate to Disparities in Mortality" **Betty Bekemeier (WA PH PBRN)** and colleagues
 - ◆ "An Innovative Service Learning Program for MPH Students: Applying Problem-Based Learning in Community Settings" **Karen Hartfield (WA PH PBRN)**
 - ◆ "Closing the Quality Chasm in Public Health: Lessons from Practice-Based Research Networks" **(National Coordinating Center)**
 - ◆ "Accelerating Evidence-based Management in Public Health: Results from the First Two Years of PBRN Research" **(National Coordinating Center)**
- **APHA Workshop on Practice-Based Research.** Public health practice-based research is the focus of a workshop slated for Sunday, November 7, from 8:00 until 11:30 am during the APHA 2010 Annual Meeting in Denver. The workshop is an opportunity for academic and practice representatives to work together in exploring “selected priority research areas” of public health systems and services research. Hosted by the Yale School of Public Health (a partner in the **Connecticut PH PBRN**), the workshop is free to attendees and breakfast is provided. The venue is the Hyatt Regency Denver, and [Kathi Traugh](#) at Yale can provide more information. To indicate tentative plans to attend and provide input into topic selection, [follow this link](#).

Research Dissemination Opportunities

**Deadline
Extended!**

- **Call for Abstracts: Modeling for Public Health Action.** CDC's Preparedness Modeling Unit invites abstracts for 20-minute presentations at its 2010 Conference on Modeling for Public Health Action. The conference is designed to "promote the exchange of information and ideas policymakers, and researchers. **Abstracts are due September 30, 2010.** The conference will be December 9-10 in Atlanta. [Conference details and call for abstracts](#). Conference organizers [Michael Washington](#) and [Shelby Alexander](#) at CDC are the contact persons for questions.
- **Request for Papers: Community-University Partnerships.** *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* is planning a spring 2011 special edition on the topic of "Sustaining Community-University Partnerships." Papers co-authored by a community member and academic researcher will be given preference. Submissions are due by Thursday, **October 14** at 7:00 pm ET. Full details are included in the [call for papers](#).

Resources in Research and Practice

REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS

- ◆ **Population Health Measures.** The National Priorities Partnership convened by the National Quality Forum recently held a meeting to consider the current state of population health status and measurement. The meeting “developed recommendations for the NPP Partners and other stakeholder groups that: identify key drivers of change and actionable interventions that if implemented would overcome the primary barriers to progressing toward our desired state; inform measure development, considering gaps in performance measurement, as well as issues related to composite measures and community indices; and address key considerations and implications for HIT.” The Population Health Convening Meeting Synthesis Report is now available [here](#):

- ◆ **NACCHO Report on Trends.** The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recently released *Trends in Local Health Department Finances, Workforce, and Activities*, a report based on data collected in the 2005 and 2008 National Profile of Local Health Departments studies. Highlights of changes that took place in local health departments between 2005 and 2008 include:
 - ◆ one in five LHDs experienced decreased expenditures;
 - ◆ the total size of the LHD workforce increased by five percent, but the numbers of nurses, epidemiologists, and health educators employed by LHDs decreased; and
 - ◆ LHDs were more likely to add or eliminate population-based activities than clinical services.

The report includes maps showing the variation in changes across states during the period. This and other reports from NACCHO’s Profile study are available at www.naccho.org/profile and are supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

NEW TOOLS

- ◆ **Measures of Well-Being.** America’s Health Insurance Plans, in partnership with Gallup and Healthways, announces “a comprehensive State and Congressional District Resource for Well-Being. The extensive data available within this tool allows users to learn about the health of their particular state or Congressional district using a variety of indicators, including behavioral factors, work quality, and physical health. The [tool](#) also offers state-by-state and district-by-district rankings and comparisons.”

COMMENTARY

- ◆ **Prevention and the ACA.** In a recent [New England Journal of Medicine](#), HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Assistant Secretary for Health Howard Koh summarize the components of the 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) that emphasize disease prevention and health and wellness promotion.

New Literature and Exemplary Studies of Interest

- ◆ **Public Health System Role in Disasters.** From ASPE and fellow PHSSR scholar Nicole Lurie and others, a NEJM [commentary](#) on the public health system’s roles in preparing for and responding to the mental health sequelae of the Gulf oil spill and other disasters.

- ◆ **Hierarchy Segmented or Synergistic?** In a new AJPH [letter](#), leading public health scholar Larry Green and colleagues challenge an implication of CDC Director Tom Frieden’s “potential

health impact” pyramid, highlighting the importance of “blended hierarchies” of public health strategies deployed and analyzed using a systems perspective.

- **CER Agenda.** In a recent JAMA [editorial](#), population health scholar David Kindig and famed health economist John Mullahy encourage the nation’s comparative effectiveness research enterprise to study the effects not only of clinical interventions but also of public health policies and broad-based population health strategies.
- **Social Network Structure of a Large Online Community for Smoking Cessation.** In a recent [American Journal of Public Health](#) article, Cobb and colleagues discussed their efforts to characterize the structure and function of QuitNet, the largest online community for smoking cessation support, using social network analysis methods. This work would serve as a basis for future studies of the effectiveness of online communities as tools for behavior change. In their study of QuitNet, which included comparison to other networks, the authors found characteristics of positive social support and connectedness previously shown to be important in smoking cessation and abstinence. They also identified subgroups for further study.
- **A Network Assessment of Community-Based Participatory Research.** Also in the July 2010 [American Journal of Public Health](#), Valente and colleagues describe their effort to examine whether a community-based initiative aimed at reducing cancer disparities increased connectedness between the participating community-based organizations (CBO) and university researchers. Ninety-one CBO and 56 university members were interviewed at two points in time, and results showed that the CBOs increased in connectedness to each other and to the researchers, but that the researchers did not increase in connectedness to the CBOs or to each other. Overall, the study confirmed the usefulness of social network analysis for evaluating community-based initiatives and for explicating many of the intangibles of such work.

Funding Opportunities and Announcements

➤ AHRQ

Researching Implementation and Change while Improving Quality (R18)

Deadline!

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) announces the Agency’s interest in supporting grants to rigorously study the implementation of quality improvement (QI) strategies and to provide generalizable scientific findings about the implementation of the QI strategy, related organizational changes, and their impact. There is increasing evidence that success in achieving QI goals is at least partially attributable to implementation processes and contexts and not just to the nature of the QI strategy. The research may be conducted by the team designing/implementing the QI strategy or a separate team. The QI strategy must be one expected to result in major improvements in health care delivery that will enhance patient outcomes. Research design and execution will yield results providing AHRQ, providers, patients, payers, policymakers, and the public with contextual care in the US. [Link](#).

Deadline: September 25, 2010

- **Health Disparities Research.** NIH is accepting R01 applications for innovative research addressing health disparities. According to the [announcement](#), "the research should take into account the characteristics of health systems and health seeking behaviors that propagate disparities." The research focus may include racial/ethnic minorities, low income, rural and other health disparity populations.

Deadline!

Application deadline: September 29, 2010.

- ◆ **Scholars in Health Policy Research.** RWJF is accepting applications to its *Scholars in Health Policy Research* program. Applicants should have earned a doctoral degree in economics, political science or sociology after January 1, 2006 or have completed degree requirements by July 15, 2011. Preference is given to applicants who have not worked extensively in health or health policy research. Up to nine individuals are selected each year for two-year fellowships at one of three universities to develop creative thinkers in health policy who will make important research contributions to the field.

Application deadline: October 13, 2010. [More information](#)

- ◆ HRSA/MCHB

R40 Maternal and Child Health Research Program

From the RFA: “Research proposals should address critical MCH questions such as public health systems and infrastructure, health disparities, quality of care, and promoting the health of MCH populations, which also support the goals of the Health Resources and Services Administration. [Link](#).”

Deadline: Oct 15, 2010

- ◆ American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society invites applications that investigate the impact of healthcare costs, healthcare system and capacity, insurance status, social factors and delivery of health care services on outcomes in cancer prevention, early detection and treatment. [Link](#).

Deadline: Oct 15, 2010

- ◆ National Institutes of Health

Economics of Prevention (R21)(RFA-RM-10-015)

The success of efforts to reform the American health care system depends on both improving health outcomes and reducing health care costs. Prevention is a key element of both those objectives, but not all prevention measures reduce costs or even improve health. Wise use of resources demands that prevention measures are targeted appropriately and implemented effectively to reduce the burden of ill health throughout the life course. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (PPACA) included incentives for expanded use of prevention services that confer net health benefits. Wise use of limited resources also demands consideration of the costs associated with generating those benefits. Economic research is needed to advance our understanding of critical issues pertaining to the allocation of resources to prevention, as distinct from treatment or other services. [Link](#).

Application Receipt Date(s): October 26, 2010

Letters of Intent Receipt Date(s): September 28, 2010

Application Due Date(s): October 26, 2010

- ◆ National Institutes of Health

Science of Structure, Organization and Practice Design in the Efficient Delivery of Effective Healthcare (R21)(RFA-RM-10-016)

This FOA solicits R21 applications for exploratory and developmental research projects that will lead to increased efficiency in the production of health and delivery of health care. Specifically, research sought under this announcement should inform 1) the identification of specific, modifiable causes of high and increasing health care costs related to the structure, organization, and production of health care; and 2) the development and refinement of interventions, practices, or policies that can address these causes while maintaining or enhancing outcomes. This initiative is part of the Health Economics Common Fund Program. [Link](#).

Application Receipt Date(s): October 26, 2010

Opening Date: September 26, 2010 (Earliest date to submit an application to Grants.gov.)
Letters of Intent Receipt Date(s): September 26, 2010
Application Due Date(s): October 26, 2010
Earliest Anticipated Start Date(s): July 1, 2011

➤ National Institutes of Health

RFA-DA-11-003 Effects of the Social Environment on Health: Measurement, Methods and Mechanisms (R01)

This FOA, issued as part of the NIH Basic Behavioral and Social Science Opportunity Network (OppNet), solicits Research Project Grant (R01) applications from institutions/organizations that propose to investigate structural, behavioral, sociocultural, environmental, cognitive, emotional, and/or biological mechanisms through which the social environment affects health outcomes. To address this objective, applicants should propose research studies that will: (1) deepen our understanding of which aspects of social environments affect health outcomes for women and men at different stages of the lifecourse and in different social, economic, geographic, racial and ethnic sub-populations; (2) lead to clearer understanding of mechanisms through which social environments have such effects; or (3) improve measurement methods and/or contribute to advances in analytic methods used in the study of social environments and health. [Link](#).

Opening Date: December 6, 2010

Letters of Intent Receipt Date: December 6, 2010

Application Due Date: January 6, 2011

➤ **Research in Innovation.** The National Science Foundation (NSF), the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation are emphasizing research to expand understanding of the influence of innovation. The three organizations have funding opportunities “to inform the future development of a data infrastructure for the study of innovation within and across organizations.” An NSF [Dear Colleague Letter](#) details the offerings of these organizations and includes links to contact persons.

➤ **RWJF Rapid-Response Call for Proposals.** [Active Living Research](#) is an RWJF national program supporting research to inform policy and environmental strategies for increasing physical activity and preventing obesity in children and adolescents, particularly among those at highest risk. Similar to the Public Health PBRN Quick Strike Research Fund (QSRF) format, this CFP seeks proposals for "opportunistic, time-sensitive studies on emerging or anticipated changes in physical activity-related policies or environments. Rapid-response grants are expected to accelerate progress toward policy and environmental strategies to prevent and reduce childhood obesity. For maximum impact, studies should be completed in as short a time frame as realistically possible, and results disseminated using methods designed to reach local, state or national decision-makers in time to help inform key policy decisions." **Deadline:** Awards made on **rolling basis**. Letter of Intent required and accepted until July 1, 2011.

➤ **RWJF PHSSR Call for Proposals.** The RWJF CFP for investigator-initiated research in PHSSR is in the drafting phase. Look for the CFP around November 30 with brief proposals due in early January. Preference is given to researchers new to the field.

PBRN/PHSSR Colleagues in the News

- **Betty Bekemeier**, a research partner in the **Washington Public Health PBRN** and co-PI of its RIA project, has been selected as one of this year's 12 recipients of the RWJF Nurse Faculty Scholar award given to junior faculty who demonstrate promise as leaders in academic nursing. Bekemeier is an assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Nursing. Her research in evidence-based decision making in public health practice will be discussed in an upcoming issue of *PBRN Week in Review*. Congratulations, Betty!

Career Opportunity

- **PHSSR Faculty Search.** The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences is seeking candidates for a tenure-track, open-rank faculty position in the Health Policy and Management Department to advance its research program in public health systems and services research. Candidates should have a successful record of research relevant to the organization, financing, and delivery of public health services or the ability to develop such a record. For more information contact gpmays@uams.edu

Key Dates

Oct 12	Round I PBRN Monthly Conference Call 11:30-12:30 ET
Oct 15:	RIA Proposals due in RWJF online system by 6:00 pm ET
Oct 21	Round II PBRN Monthly Conference Call 1:00-2:30 ET
Oct 21-22	STiNC Working Group meeting in Little Rock
Nov 6-10:	2011 APHA Annual Meeting in Denver
Nov 9	CANCELLED for APHA: Round I PBRN Monthly Conference Call
Nov 17	Quarterly webinar (date subject to change depending upon speaker)
Nov 18	Round II PBRN Monthly Conference Call 1:00-2:30 ET
April 10-12	2011 Annual Grantee and NAC Meetings in Lexington
April 12-14	2011 PHSSR Keeneland Conference in Lexington (conference changes to a Noon kick-off in 2011)

Next Issue October 1, 2010