

ISSUE BRIEF

Setting the Agenda for
Public Health Services &
Systems Research

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While Public Health Services & Systems Research (PHSSR) had been conducted for some time, the first attempt to establish a coherent research agenda took place in the early 2000s, and resulted in a series of research agendas being published. Perhaps the most notable agendas published were by Lenaway et al.¹, and the agenda developed by the Council on Linkages and housed on the Public Health Foundation's website. While these were an important step forward, the field of PHSSR has since advanced from infancy to adolescence.

As a result, PHSSR researchers, public health practitioners, and policy makers recognized the need to re-examine the state of PHSSR and develop a revised research agenda that reflected the strides made in the field, as well as the new deficits uncovered.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) lead an initiative to update the research agenda for PHSSR with assistance from the NCC and Altarum.

The initiative had two major parts, intended to work in concert. The **first part** was to identify the current state of PHSSR through a series of comprehensive reviews of PHSSR literature. The **second part** was

to disseminate the results of the reviews to specific audiences composed of members of the research and practice communities, and use their input to shape the direction of the new research agenda through a series of webinars, vetting sessions held at major national conferences, and via an online forum.

Systematic Review of the PHSSR Literature

In early 2010, five junior investigators were commissioned to conduct a series of comprehensive systematic reviews of the PHSSR literature in four broad areas: the public health workforce, quality improvement, organization & structure, and technology, data & methods. These junior investigators were paired with senior researchers who would serve as mentors to guide their efforts. Additionally, they were given access to technical assistance provided by the NCC.

These efforts resulted in a series of reports submitted by the junior investigators in late 2010. The reports were the basis of a white paper produced by NCC staff intended to provide background information

Systematic Review of the PHSSR Literature (cont'd)

to participants at all the vetting sessions. In addition, the Altarum Institute was commissioned to conduct a review of the larger body of PHSSR literature. The NCC and Altarum reports were used to create a draft list of PHSSR research priorities that were presented during a series of webinars intended to solicit input from the PHSSR community and expand the research agenda.

Webinars

In early 2011, four webinars addressing key areas in PHSSR (the public health workforce, finance, organization & structure, and technology, data & methods) were conducted by Altarum personnel with assistance from the NCC staff. Representatives from the practice and research community with expertise in each area were invited to attend the webinars.

Participants were asked to review the research priorities created from the systematic reviews, identify any perceived deficits, and create research agenda items that would fill those deficits. The webinar results were used by Altarum and NCC staff to modify the original research priorities into a larger, more comprehensive research agenda, intended to be vetted by the larger PHSSR community.

Vetting Sessions

Upon the completion of the webinars, the research agenda was modified to reflect the webinar input, and prepared for vetting by the larger PHSSR community. The vetting process is ongoing, and has two main components: live vetting sessions at the PHSSR Keeneland Conference, the AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting, and the

NACCHO and ASTHO annual meetings, and online vetting through the PHSSR IdeaScale website, as well as both RWJF's and CDC's intranet systems.

The live vettings are facilitated and led by personnel from Altarum and the NCC to solicit coherent input from the audiences. The Keeneland Conference and AcademyHealth sessions have been completed, and the research agenda has been modified to reflect the input from these meetings. Audio recordings from the sessions can be found online via the PHSSR website and the AcademyHealth Special Interest Group page. The NACCHO and ASTHO vetting sessions will be complete by the end of Summer 2011.

The online vetting process collects input from interested parties who are able to vote on research priorities in the four areas, as well as submit comments on individual agenda items and the agenda in general. The survey is available online at <http://phssragenda.ideascale.com>. Results will be blended with those garnered from the live vetting opportunities.

About the Authors

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Endnotes

1. Public health systems research: Setting a national agenda
Author(s): Lenaway D, Halverson P, Sotnikov S, et al.
Source: AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Volume: 96 Issue: 3 Pages: 410-413 Published: MAR 2006
(<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/cgi/content/short/96/3/410>)