

PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEMS AND SERVICES RESEARCH (PHSSR)

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About NORC at the University of Chicago and Public Health Systems and Services Research (PHSSR)

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research organization that helps governments, associations, and businesses make better decisions through data and analysis. Since 1941, NORC's leadership and experience in data collection, analysis, and dissemination—coupled with deep subject matter expertise—has provided the foundation for innovative, informed, and effective solutions. NORC is headquartered in downtown Chicago with additional offices on the University of Chicago's campus, the D.C. Metro area, Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco.

NORC's health research group includes prominent health policy experts, nationally recognized health services researchers, and leaders in survey design and implementation. The staff expertise spans a broad multidisciplinary spectrum including public health, economics, sociology, epidemiology, policy, statistics, medicine and biological sciences, social work, and political science. NORC's public health systems and services research (PHSSR) team explores a range of topics, such as how public health services are delivered, financed, staffed, and organized, with the goal of improving the health of communities and populations through a systems perspective. Clients include public health associations, foundations, and public health agencies at the local, state, and federal levels.

Sample Projects

Formative Research to Support a Survey of Business Leaders. On behalf of the de Beaumont Foundation, NORC is conducting a preliminary assessment of business leaders' attitudes towards health. The goal is to understand businesses' engagement in activities to improve the health of their employees and their communities, and to identify the incentives for investing in health. Methods include interviews with 15 respondents, including Chamber of Commerce Executives and business leaders, which will guide the development of a future survey of business leaders designed to understand more broadly how the business community and health intersect.

Assessing Evidence-Based Practice in Public Health Preparedness and Response. For the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NORC is assessing the barriers and facilitators to evidence-based practice (EBP) in public health preparedness and response. NORC is designing and fielding a survey of state, territorial, and local public health preparedness practitioners to explore attitudes and perceptions of EBPs and the factors that affect uptake, implementation, and dissemination in practice. The survey will be sent to all state and territorial health departments and a stratified, random sample of LHDs. NORC is working with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) to implement the study.

Opportunities and Challenges Facing Rural Public Health Agencies. On behalf of NACCHO, NORC partnered with East Tennessee State University (ETSU) to conduct the rural analyses of the 2016 National Profile of Local Health Departments, combined with targeted case studies, to explore differences in opportunities and challenges faced by local health departments (LHDs) across varying geographies. The analysis focused on differences in funding and clinical and population-based service provision between rural and non-rural LHDs.



Evaluation of the ASPPH/CDC Fellowship Programs. For the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH), NORC evaluated the ASPPH/CDC fellowship programs. NORC analyzed several data sources, including the ASPPH Reporting and Evaluation Tool, public health competency data, and reports on fellows' career paths, to assess the experiences and outcomes of fellowship participants. NORC delivered a final report of key program findings, recommendations for revising the data collection instruments, and other recommendations regarding the fellowship program and future evaluation.

Analysis of Data Methods and Taxonomies Used to Assess the Public Health Workforce in the U.S. For the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), NORC studied how state and local health departments define, track, and assess the public health workforce to assess trends and needs. NORC vetted a workforce taxonomy with a sample of state health departments to assess its usability and utility and analyzed data from the PH-WINS survey to identify missing fields within the taxonomy.

Evaluation of Short-Term Outcomes from Public Health Accreditation. On behalf of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), NORC evaluated the short-term outcomes and broader effects of the national public health agency accreditation program. NORC conducted interviews, focus groups, and surveys with applicant, non-applicant, and accredited health departments and other stakeholders. NORC also surveyed comparison sample of non-engaged health departments to assess barriers to accreditation, opportunities for engagement, and the broader impacts of accreditation on public health practice.

Classification of State Health Agencies. For ASTHO, NORC developed a survey to operationally classify state health agencies (SHA) into four categories: centralized, decentralized, mixed, and shared. Because most states have been inconsistently categorized in past studies, this project sought to develop a uniform and transparent classification method, based on inputs from expert advisors. The survey was vetted by a sample of state health officials and fielded in all 50 states. A decision tree was developed by which each of the 50 SHAs was objectively categorized based on survey responses.

Assessment of STD Clinic Users to Understand Reasons for Utilizing Services. With funding from CDC and NACCHO, NORC is assessing sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinic client demographic characteristics, insurance status, reason for accessing care and choosing the STD clinic, and types of healthcare services utilized. NORC conducted a baseline assessment for this work in 2013. This follow-up study is being conducted at periodic time intervals to allow comparison of patterns resulting from health reform activities. Findings will be used by health departments, clinics, CDC, and NACCHO to ensure that STD services continue to meet client needs.

Longitudinal Sample of Medically Underserved Women. This prospective cohort study for CDC examines access to preventive health services among medically underserved women. NORC is assessing behaviors and outcomes among women previously enrolled in the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program who are now insured. NORC is coordinating with state health departments to survey eligible women over three years. Findings will help CDC understand insurance coverage patterns as well as barriers and facilitators to obtaining preventive health care services through insurance.

Improving Disaster Death Scene Investigation Process and Death Reporting Practices. This CDC project sought to enhance data collected after a natural disaster, improve identification and attribution of related deaths, and increase the consistency of data collected and reporting of disaster-related deaths across jurisdictions. NORC developed a toolkit, informed through a literature review, environmental scan, and expert workgroup meetings.

Other Projects

Access to Rural Public Health Services

An Examination of Public Health Financing in the United States

Assessing the Status and Prospects of State and Local Health Department Information Technology Infrastructure

ASTHO Performance Dashboard Pilot Test Evaluation

Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Rural Health Departments Seeking Accreditation

Economic Evaluation of State Healthcare-Associated Infection Prevention Initiatives

Evaluation of the NACCHO Accreditation Preparation and Quality Improvement Demonstration Sites Project

Evaluation of the PHAB Beta Test

Evaluation of the RWJF Common Ground Initiative

Evaluation Plan for the National Public Health Accreditation Program

Exploring the Challenges in Diagnosis and Treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) in Rural Areas

Initial Evaluation of the Public Health Accreditation Program

NACCHO Prototype Operational Definition Metrics for Capacity Assessment

National Public Health Improvement Initiative (NPHII) Case Studies

National Profile of Tribal Public Health Agencies

Public Health and Health Reform Policy Research, Synthesis, and Translation Activities

Public Health Innovations Implementation Program Evaluation

Translation, Dissemination, and Implementation of Public Health Preparedness and Response Research and Training Evaluation

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