

## 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 headquartered in downtown Chicago with additional offices on the University of Chicago's campus, the D.C. Metro area, Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco. Since 1941, NORC's leadership and experience in data collection, analysis, and dissemination—coupled with deep subject matter expertise—has provided the foundation for effective solutions.

NORC's health research group includes prominent health policy makers, nationally recognized health services researchers, and leading experts in survey design and implementation. The staff expertise spans a broad multidisciplinary spectrum including economics, sociology, public health, medicine and biological sciences, policy, epidemiology, social work, statistics, and political science. The Bethesda-based PHSSR team research encompasses a range of topics—how public health services are delivered, financed, and organized—with the goal of improving the health of communities and populations through a systems perspective. Clients include policymakers, private and nonprofit organizations, and public health agencies at the state, local, tribal, and federal levels.

### Sample Projects

**Evaluating Public Health Financing, Programs, and Services.** For the DHHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), NORC is conducting a study to assess public health financing nationally. Methods include an environmental scan to highlight illustrative examples of funding mechanisms at the state and local levels, and to assess the availability of credible public health financing data. In addition, case studies will be conducted to generate a detailed understanding of financing and budget issues in seven states, including how funds flow to the local level, as well as overall trends and impacts of recent policy changes.

**Evaluation of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Common Ground Initiative.** For RWJF, NORC conducted an evaluation of Common Ground, which provided grants to 31 state health departments (SHDs) and local health departments (LHDs) to analyze and streamline business processes and identify common processes across HDs. NORC conducted a four-year evaluation to assess grantee implementation of the Common Ground framework; challenges and strategies for addressing them; and key elements necessary to achieve transformation of HD business practices and related information technology requirements.



**Evaluation of the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) Beta Test.** With funding from PHAB, NORC conducted an evaluation of the Beta Test of national voluntary public health accreditation. NORC used a multi-method approach to gather feedback from the 30 health departments piloting the accreditation process. Methods included online surveys, tracking forms, site visits, and interviews with Beta Test sites and site visitors. Information was used by PHAB to improve the accreditation process prior to its 2011 national rollout. Previously, NORC had coordinated the vetting process of the PHAB standards and measures.

**National Profile of Tribal Public Health Agencies.** For RWJF, and in partnership with the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), NORC conducted an analysis of NIHB's national profile of tribal public health agencies and developed recommendations for future tribal profile efforts. The profile included information regarding tribal public health budgets, staffing, leadership, program areas, and priorities.

**Classification of State Health Agencies.** For the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), NORC developed a survey to operationally classify SHAs into the categories of centralized, decentralized, mixed, and shared. Because most states have been inconsistently categorized in past studies, this project sought to develop a uniform and transparent method for classification, 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.

**National Public Health Improvement Initiative (NPHII) Case Studies.** For ASTHO, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), and the American Public Health Association (APHA), NORC is conducting three sets of case studies as part of the Affordable Care Act Prevention and Public Health Fund NPHII program to highlight best practices in relationships between state and local health departments, in policy efforts, and in health information technology. NORC is also conducting follow up work for its SHD classification study, mapping public health infrastructure at the local level for those states with mixed infrastructures.

**Access to Rural Public Health Services.** For the National Rural Health Association (NRHA), NORC conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with state and local public health stakeholders in five states that had been identified as having jurisdictions not covered by local public health. A detailed case study of one of the states that had achieved success in expanding access to public health services in rural areas was also conducted to identify strategies for establishing and maintaining local governmental public health infrastructure.

## Other Projects

National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Prototype Operational Definition Metrics for Capacity Assessment

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

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

Evaluation Plan for the National Public Health Accreditation Program

Financing Rural Public Health Activities in Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

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

Assessing the ACA-Related Impacts and Opportunities for Public Health and Prevention Programs

Learn more about NORC and its work in PHSSR at [www.norc.org](http://www.norc.org)

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