

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 institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge.

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's research encompasses a range of topics, such as 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, territorial, and federal levels.

Sample Projects

Implications of the Affordable Care Act for HHS Public Health Programs. For the Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, NORC is conducting a study to assess the scope and scale of impacts that the Affordable Care Act will have on public health programs at the state and local levels. NORC is developing case studies with states that are both expanding and not expanding Medicaid to explore potential impacts on public health programs that assure preventive care services, and secondary impacts on other health department programs and functions.

Initial Evaluation of the Public Health Accreditation Program. With funding from Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), NORC is conducting a three-year evaluation of the national public health accreditation program. NORC is collecting quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, interviews, and focus groups of applicant health departments, site visitors, the PHAB Accreditation Committee, and other accreditation stakeholders. Evaluation topics include a process assessment, examination of the health department experience, and assessment of short-term outcomes associated with the national accreditation program.

Analysis of Data Methods and Taxonomies Used to Assess the Public Health Workforce in the U.S. For the Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, NORC studied how state and local health departments define, track and assess the public health workforce in order to assess specific trends and needs. As part of this study NORC vetted a proposed 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 draft taxonomy.

Public Health and Health Reform Policy Research, Synthesis and Translation Activities. For the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Office of the Associate Director for Policy, NORC developed a set of white papers and policy briefs on



priority topics related to public health policy impacts of Affordable Care Act implementation, focusing on public health and health care collaborations. NORC will also perform literature reviews and targeted environmental scans.

Classification of State Health Agencies. For the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, 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.

Practice-Based Needs and Research Questions Related to Public Health Emergency Preparedness Capabilities. For the CDC Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, NORC designed and fielded a survey of state, territorial, and local public health preparedness research needs, and collecting qualitative data through interviews with key informants. The survey was fielded to all state and territorial health departments, and a stratified sample of approximately 200 local health departments, to identify practice-based needs that align with CDC Public Health Emergency Preparedness capabilities.

ASTHO Performance Dashboard Pilot Test Evaluation. On behalf of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), NORC implemented a pilot test and evaluation of the ASTHO Performance Dashboard. The intent of the pilot test evaluation was to assess the extent to which the indicators for performance are appropriate for state and territorial health agencies and the feasibility of implementation of the Performance Dashboard. Through the evaluation, NORC engaged the nine state and territorial health agencies selected by ASTHO to participate in the pilot test and evaluation as pilot sites. NORC gathered quantitative and qualitative feedback from each pilot site through a structured Evaluation Feedback Form and also conducted key informant interviews with leadership at each pilot site. NORC developed a final evaluation report that summarized the quantitative and qualitative feedback gathered through the evaluation, identified gaps and opportunities, suggested revisions to the indicators, and assessed the feasibility of implementation of the Performance Dashboard.

Longitudinal Sample of Medically Underserved Women. On behalf of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), NORC is conducting a study to examine the facilitators and barriers to receiving preventive health services among medically underserved women. The purpose of this project is to conduct a prospective cohort study of the health behaviors and outcomes of women currently served by CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) who gain new health insurance coverage. To do this, the project will follow a sample of women previously enrolled in the NBCCEDP who are now insured. NORC will coordinate with seven state health department programs to assist with creating the survey sample. Eligible women will be surveyed once a year either via a web survey or by telephone for a period of three years. Results from the study will help CDC understand insurance coverage patterns as well as barriers and facilitators to obtaining needed preventive health care services through their insurance.

Evaluation of Short-Term Outcomes from Public Health Accreditation. On behalf of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), NORC is conducting a two-year evaluation of the short-term outcomes and broader effects of public health accreditation. To identify outcomes, NORC is collecting quantitative and qualitative data via interviews, focus groups, and surveys with applicant, non-applicant, and accredited health departments and other stakeholders. NORC is including a comparison sample of non-engaged health departments in this study, to assess barriers to accreditation, opportunities for engagement, and the broader impacts of accreditation on public health practice.

Other Projects

Access to Rural Public Health Services

An Examination of Public Health Financing in the United States

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

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

Assessment of STD Clinic Users to Understand Reasons for Utilizing Services

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 NACCHO Profile Study to Assess Reasons for Non-Response

Evaluation of the Public Health Accreditation Board Beta Test

Evaluation of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Common Ground Initiative

Evaluation Plan for the National Public Health Accreditation Program

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

National Public Health Improvement Initiative (NPHII) Case Studies

National Profile of Tribal Public Health Agencies

Vetting the Public Health Accreditation Board Standards and Measures

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