

NORTH CAROLINA LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION BOARD
Program Policies and Procedures

Policy Statement on the Role and Value of Accreditation

Manual:	<u>Applicable Signatures/Title</u>
Section:	Administrator:
Distributed to/Date:	Board Chair:
	NCIPH Director:
	Effective Date:
	Supercedes:

Accreditation is a status granted to a local health department that has been found to meet or exceed stated criteria of capacity and quality, as determined by an on-site assessment and review of documented evidence. In North Carolina, local health department accreditation is mandatory. Currently the program accepts volunteers for assessment. Accreditation is conferred by the North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation (NCLHDA) Board housed through the NC Institute for Public Health.

Accreditation has two fundamental purposes: to certify the capacity of the local health department to deliver the ten essential services and to incite and assist in the performance improvement of the local health department. Accreditation strives to guarantee that a citizen of NC can walk into any local health department in the state and be assured that the service that will be received will be competently delivered.

The entity directing local health department accreditation is the NC Institute for Public Health in partnership with the NC Division of Public Health and the NC Association of Local Health Directors. The Accreditation Administrator is responsible for the operation of the program.

The accreditation process is conducted through:

- A self-assessment of the local health department
- The collection by the local health department of evidence to support benchmarks and activities
- An on-site visit by a peer site visit team
- The site visit report review and decision by the NCLHDA Board

Local health department accreditation does not guarantee outcome of services within a local health department, but gives reasonable assurance of the basic quality and the capacity to provide core public health functions. Local health department accreditation assesses the general efforts of the local health department and not to the specific outcomes of programs or clinics.

The NCLHDA Board considers the characteristics of the whole agency. For this reason, the assessment process gives attention not only to the programs of the local health departments it accredits, but also to other characteristics such as facility conditions, regulatory and legal

compliance, personnel procedures, workforce development, fiscal soundness, community collaboration, governance and administrative strength and leadership.

Accreditation of a local health department certifies to the general public that the agency:

- a. has an appropriate community mission and purpose
- b. has the resources needed to accomplish its mission and purpose
- c. can demonstrate that it is accomplishing its mission and purpose
- d. gives reason to believe that it will continue to accomplish its mission and purpose

Local health department improvement is encouraged by the NCLHDA Board to continue self-evaluation seeking to identify what the agency does well, determining the areas in which improvement is needed, and developing plans to address identified improvement needs. While being accredited indicates an acceptable level of local health department quality, any agency, however excellent, is capable of performance improvement, which must come from its own clear identification and understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

Local health department improvement is also encouraged through the recommendations provided by the site visit team, composed of respected public health peers. In addition to accrediting standards, assistance for program improvement is provided through communication with other accredited local public health departments, the Division of Public Health, the Division of Environmental Health, the Institute for Public Health, and private consultants.

In fulfilling its two purposes, certification of local health department capacity and performance improvement, accreditation provides value to several constituents:

To the public, the value of accreditation includes:

- a. an assurance of an external evaluation of the local health department and a finding that there is conformity to general expectations in the profession of public health
- b. an identification of local health departments which have voluntarily undertaken explicit activities directed at improving the quality of the institution and its professional programs, and are carrying them out successfully
- c. an improvement in the professional and clinical services available to the public as accredited programs modify their requirements to reflect changes in knowledge and accepted model practices
- d. an assurance that the scope of work of an accredited local health department has been found to meet the needs of the community

To elected officials, the value of accreditation includes:

- a. the knowledge that the local health department is wisely using resources
- b. an understanding that services are of a level to match any available in the community
- c. the awareness that the local health department demonstrates that the work of the agency involves and targets the communities served

Local health departments benefit from accreditation through:

- a. the (external) incentive for self-evaluation and self-directed local health department improvement

- b. the strengthening of local health department by the external review and counsel provided through the accrediting body
- c. the application of criteria and standards which can help guard against external forces harmful to local health department quality by providing benchmarks independent of those forces
- d. the enhancing of the reputation of an accredited institution because of public regard for accreditation
- e. the use of accreditation as one means by to gain eligibility for funds, since funding organizations and foundations view accredited status as a highly desirable indicator of local health department quality

Accreditation serves the profession of public health by:

- a. providing a means for the participation of local public health practitioners in setting the requirements for accreditation
- b. contributing to the improvement of public health practice