Overview

The goal of the North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation (NCLHDA) program is to improve and protect the public’s health by assuring the capacity of NC local health departments to perform core functions and essential services. The core functions of assessment, policy development and assurance are defined through 41 Benchmarks and 148 Activities that are based on the 10 Essential Public Health Services plus Facilities and Administrative Services and Governance. These standards are based on NC’s public health statutes, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) and the National Public Health Performance Standards Program.

Number of Benchmarks and Activities:
The 41 benchmarks and 148 activities required by state rules include sections on assessment, policy development, assurance, facilities and administrative services, and governance.

Local Health Department Accreditation Site Visit Team Members:
The Site Visit Teams include no fewer than four individuals with experience or expertise in environmental health, public health nursing, public health administration and policy development/governance.

North Carolina is one of the first states in the nation to legislatively mandate the accreditation of all local health departments.

History

In 2002, the North Carolina Division of Public Health and the North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors undertook an initiative to explore a standards-based system for accrediting local public health departments throughout the state. The collaborative effort developed the basic program and completed accreditation pilots in 2004 and 2005. In 2006, NCLHDA became a fully operational mandatory system with ten local health departments completing the process each year.

The Robert Wood Johnson Turning Point Initiative, of which North Carolina was an awardee, provided the initial funding and framework out of which the accreditation effort grew. Public health champions in the NC General Assembly also provided the needed resources and authority to make the program mandatory.

Legislation

Senate Bill 804 was signed in the fall of 2005 creating and funding North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation. This was an act to improve the public health infrastructure by establishing an accreditation system for local health departments, as recommended by the Public Health Task Force 2004. The legislation and adopted rules made accreditation mandatory. The law requires all 85 local health departments in North Carolina to undergo the accreditation process by 2014. The initial accreditation of all local health departments is to be implemented over a period of eight years, which began January 1, 2006. The period of accreditation is specified in the legislation as four years.

Contact Us:
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The NCIPH, by legislative mandate, has provided Accreditation staff support since 2002.

www.sph.unc.edu/nciph/accred
The accreditation program has three functional components:

- A health department self-assessment based on the 41 benchmarks and 148 activities
- A three-day site visit by a multidisciplinary team of peer volunteers, and
- Determination of accreditation status by the North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation Board, including an appeals process.

The program is a collaborative effort among the following:

- North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors (NCALHD)
- Association of North Carolina Boards of Health (ANCBH)
- Division of Public Health (DPH) in the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS)
- Division of Environmental Health (DEH) in the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR)
- North Carolina Institute for Public Health (NCIPH) at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Public Health

The purpose of the three-day site visit is to amplify, clarify and verify the health department’s self-assessment. The site visit team will:

- Review the Health Department Self-Assessment Instrument and supporting documentation
- Visit the local health department facilities, and
- Interview local health department staff, Board of Health members and other persons necessary to evaluate compliance with the benchmarks.

Benefits of Accreditation

- Communicates the value of the public health agency to the community
- Promotes sharing of policies, procedures and best practices
- Highlights health department strengths
- Identifies areas for health department improvement
- Aids health departments in setting future goals
- Provides opportunities for funding restricted to accredited agencies

North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation Board

The Accreditation program is governed and adjudicated by an independent entity, the North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation Board which is managed by the NCIPH. The 17-member Board, appointed by North Carolina’s Department of Health and Human Services Secretary, is comprised of county commissioners, Board of Health members, local health directors, Division of Public Health staff, Division of Environmental Health staff and at-large members.