Six North Carolina local health departments were awarded the status of re-accreditation at the Accreditation Board meeting held in Raleigh on July 17th, 2009. The six local health departments—Caswell, Forsyth, Northampton, Madison, Transylvania, and Wayne—were accredited by the Board after hearing the reports from their site visits held in April – June, 2009. The process of accreditation is designed to ensure that local health departments are capable of providing all of the essential public health services for its citizens. NC now has a total of 50 accredited health departments. Congratulations to Caswell, Forsyth, Northampton, Madison, Transylvania, and Wayne!

On July 17th, the Accreditation Board voted to approve the proposed Re-Accreditation requirements. The Accreditation Administrator received much feedback from locals, consultants, Accreditation Board members, and site visitors. The feedback was incorporated into the approved Re-Accreditation requirements, which have now been incorporated into the current Health Department Self-Assessment Instrument (HDSAI) for locals to use. To view the revised HDSAI that will be used by health departments seeking initial accreditation as well as those seeking re-accreditation go to www.sph.unc.edu/nicph/accred. There is link from the home page or you can find the document on the health department materials page.

Accreditation Budget Update

The NC Local Health Department Accreditation program is still awaiting final determination of the amount of funding for this fiscal year. The contract through the Division of Public Health is also being finalized. As of now, the status statement released to all health directors back in June is still in effect and Accreditation operations are on hold until further notice. Accreditation staff continue to work on accreditation documentation and with other NC Institute for Public Health projects. Once final funding is known and the scope of work is determined, we will share information on the work plan for the year.
Our NC accreditation system continues to be a partner in the national accreditation process and is currently working with the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) to help them develop their documentation for the voluntary national accreditation process. NC’s Accreditation staff are developing several system documents that will be used in the upcoming beta test and beyond. The documents include a readiness checklist, a guide to accreditation, the self-assessment tool and the interpretation guidance. The work is scheduled to be completed by October 1, 2009.

**Accreditation Benefits: Impacts & Links to Performance Improvement**

Dorothy Cilenti, MSW, MPH, DrPh, conducted a study to determine the benefits of accreditation as her DrPh dissertation. The objective of the study was to determine how local public health agency accreditation impacts public health performance. Survey data collected in October 2008 from 80 local health agencies in North Carolina compares accredited and nonaccredited local public health agency performance on three domains: policy development and implementation, community engagement, and leadership behavior. Secondary data analysis using performance data from the NC State Center for Health Statistics compares North Carolina counties served by accredited and nonaccredited local public health on 13 performance indicators. Finally, key informant interviews with health directors and management team members from high performing local public health agencies supplements findings from the surveys and performance indicator data.

A cross-sectional survey design was used to assess local public health agency performance on key activities associated with the NC Local Health Department Accreditation Program. Descriptive analyses were conducted consisting of question-specific frequency distributions with p-values used to determine whether there were significant differences in scores for each domain based on the accreditation status of the responding agency. Time-series comparisons of performance improvement in accredited and nonaccredited local public health agencies were conducted to describe patterns of variation in performance improvement across accredited and nonaccredited agencies. A thematic analysis of transcripts from key informant interviews was conducted using across-case matrices derived from within-case summaries.

Preliminary findings indicate that accredited and nonaccredited local public health agencies in North Carolina differ with respect to the degree to which they demonstrate policy development and implementation and community engagement, with accredited local public health agencies demonstrating higher scores on these domains. These findings will provide valuable information to North Carolina public health leaders and the national voluntary accreditation efforts regarding ways to ensure that public health agency accreditation drives high performance.

Dorothy plans to present her research findings at the NC Public Health Association meeting in September, 2009 as well as the American Public Health Association meeting in November, 2009.
Fifty health departments have now been accredited! Taking a look at the map below, you will see that ALL health departments are now either accredited or have been scheduled to participate in the process. This map also shows the schedule for Re-Accreditation.