

Slide 1

Section 2: Understanding the Work of a Board of Health

Part 1: The Core Functions of Public Health



Section 2, Understanding the Work of a Board of Health, Part 1: The Core Functions of Public Health

There are two parts in Section 2.

Part 1 will focus on understanding the work of a board of health by examining its relationship to the core functions of public health.

Part 2 will also focus on understanding the work of a board of health by describing the ten essential services of public health and how they relate to the core functions.

Slide 2

Big Picture of Public Health

- How does the work of a board of health fit into the bigger picture?



NCIPH 2

As you saw in Section 1 of this orientation, “Ten Great Public Health Achievements of the 20th Century”, public health is a discipline that must be responsive to the health threats, changes and challenges that local communities experience.

Sometimes those threats to health originate on other continents, around the world—such as the West Nile Virus, SARS and Monkeypox and this reminds us that our local community also has a global connection.

Slide 3

Purpose of Public Health

- Prevent epidemics and spread of disease
- Protect against environmental hazards
- Prevent injuries



NCIPH 3

How does the work of a board of health fit into the bigger picture of public health?

To understand this, we will start by looking first at the purposes of public health, since that is what provides the context for public health practice and decision making.

The fundamental purpose of public health is to:

- Prevent epidemics and the spread of disease, including bioterrorism
- Protect against environmental hazards and
- Prevent injuries

Slide 4

Purpose of Public Health

- Promote and encourage healthy behaviors and mental health



NCIPH 4

Public health also exists to:

- Promote and encourage healthy behaviors and mental health to prevent disease and accidental injuries

Slide 5

Purpose of Public Health

- Respond to disasters and assist communities in recovery
- Assure quality and accessibility of health services



NCIPH 5

Other purposes of public health are to:

- Respond to disasters and assist communities in recovery and
- Assure the quality and accessibility of health services

Slide 6

Role of Public Health

- Includes clinical services
- Assures other conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives
 - Prevention of, and protection from, threats to the public’s health



NCIPH 6

While the role of public health includes clinical services, medical care is only a part of what constitutes public health practice.

In public health, medical services are often provided for hard-to-reach populations, the uninsured and patients with limited education or who are non-English speaking. Public health is intended to assure many other conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives--for example, prevention of, or protection from, threats to the health of the entire population served by your local public health agency.

Slide 7

1988 Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report

- Assessed status of public health in U.S.



NCIPH 7

The 1988 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *The Future of Public Health*, critically assessed the status of public health in the United States and found that the capacity of the nation’s public health agencies was seriously lacking.

Slide 8

1988 Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report

- Recommendations:
 - Implement new governmental functions to strengthen nation’s public health system
 - Reestablish boards of health
 - Assess public health needs
 - Develop policy
 - Assure availability of services

NCIPH 8

The panel completing the IOM Report recommended new governmental functions at federal, state and local levels to strengthen our nation’s public health system.

Localities, they said, should reestablish boards of health or “public health councils”, to assess public health needs, develop public health policy and assure that public health services are available. In North Carolina, we undertook to strengthen our local boards of health in response to this recommendation.

Slide 9

1988 Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report

- Members of local boards of health to serve as:
 - Advocates for public health
 - Buffers between politics and provision of services

NCIPH 9

In this same IOM report, the role of these boards of health is discussed in terms of their members serving as advocates for public health as well as buffers between politics and the provision of public health services.

Slide 10

Core Functions of Public Health

- Assessment
- Policy Development
- Assurance

NCIPH 10

The report also articulated the mission, substance and organizational framework of public health. The fundamental purpose of public health was defined in terms of three core functions: assessment, policy development and assurance.

Understanding the work of a board of health, then, can be advanced by looking at its relationship to the local health department in terms of these three core functions.

Slide 11

Core Functions of Public Health

- **Assessment**
- Policy Development
- Assurance

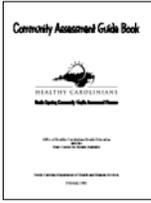
NCIPH 11

The first core function of public health is Assessment.

Slide 12

Assessment

- Community assessment
 - What community resources are and what is needed



NCIPH 12

Every four years, your health department is required to submit a community health assessment--a very complex, and important job. This is a good example of the core function of Assessment in action.

The community assessment is accomplished through community collaboration, so the primary data is actually collected directly from the community. Through this assessment process, it is possible to understand what your community resources are, and what are still needed.

An assessment can determine whether your community is putting its public health energies and resources into the right places. For example, several years ago, the top priority health issue might have been smoking cessation, while today it may be childhood obesity.

Slide 13

Assessment

- Findings of a community assessment help clarify:
 - Populations within the community
 - Health status and health concerns of these populations



NCIPH 13

The findings of a community health assessment will help clarify the populations within your community, their health status and health concerns.

Slide 14

Assessment

Community Assessment

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Strategic Plan

What are the needs of the community, families, and individuals?

What are the public health initiatives the health department will undertake to meet those needs?

NCIPH 14

Your board of health can then use the community assessment to develop a strategic plan. The strategic plan includes identifying and facilitating partnerships which make it possible to connect the public health needs of the community, families and individuals with local public health initiatives.

Slide 15

Assessment

- Examples:
 - Initiating an:
 - Annual evaluation of health director
 - Annual review of board

NCIPH 15

Other examples of assessment activities of a board of health would be: initiating an annual evaluation of the health director and initiating an annual review of the board itself, for example, to evaluate the way your meetings work.

Slide 16

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a copy of the most recent community assessment done by your health department? If so, have you had a chance to read it?
2. Are you aware of any local programs that were initiated or strengthened as a result of the most recent assessment?

NCIPH 16

Discussion Questions:

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Slide 17

Core Functions of Public Health

- Assessment
- Policy Development
- Assurance

NCIPH 17

The second core function of public health is Policy Development.

Slide 18

Board Policies...

- Specify what broad goals should be achieved by your local health department



NCIPH 18

When your board develops a strategic plan that focuses on the broad goals for the health department and board initiatives to support those goals, it is performing a policy making function.

Slide 19

Board Policies...

- Affect the whole organization
- Affect what the organization will do

NCIPH 19

Your board of health has the authority to make policy for the operations and management of the local health department. Such policies include those that affect what the health department as a whole will or will not do. For example, a board may set a policy that defines what services will be offered at the health department, and which, if any, could or should be provided by other agencies in the county. This authority may be limited by state laws or county ordinances or policies.

Your board of health also has the authority to make laws, in the form of local rules, to protect the public health within the board's jurisdiction. This authority is limited by statute (GS 130A-39) and case law (Peedin, Craig). To learn more about the case law cited here, be sure to read the article, "The Rulemaking Authority of North Carolina Local Boards of Health", included in the handouts for this section.

Slide 20

Policy Making	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice and decision making• Examples:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Board approved strategic plan<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set priorities for next 5-10 years– Board of health bylaws<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define relationships and board functions	
	20

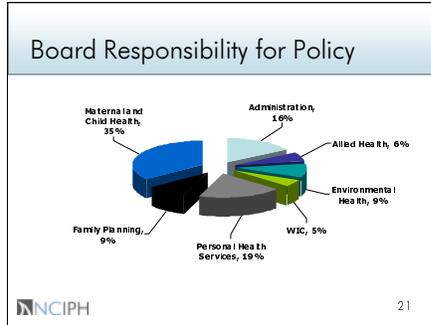
Boards are called upon to give advice to and work with their health director to make decisions about establishing partnerships in the community, developing programs and/or maintaining services at the health department. When the board participates in this decision making process, they are functioning as policy makers.

Examples of board policy might include: The board-approved strategic plan for the health department and the bylaws for the board of health.

The strategic plan should set the priorities for the next 5-10 years and include the department's goals for attending to public health needs. When the board includes this, they are providing an important policy statement for the health department.

The board's bylaws should define the relationship between the board and the director. Policy that addresses the hiring, evaluating and firing of a health director would be an example of this. Board composition, guidelines for board meetings and adjudication policy and procedures can also be included in the bylaws. All policies must be consistent with other laws applicable to the local health department. For example, the policies and procedures in your local board of health bylaws must be in keeping with North Carolina Open Meetings laws.

Slide 21



The chart you see here is an example of how a budget could be allocated. It is not intended as a template for your particular health department. Both programmatic needs and available resources differ from county to county, so what works for your county may not work for another.

It is also important to note that the use of funds is not entirely left to your agency's discretion. This is because federal and state monies are often designated to be used only for very specific programs.

As a board member, you need to be knowledgeable about the agency budget, because how the agency allocates money is perceived as a significant statement of policy.

As a board member, your responsibility for developing policy does not extend to developing staff policies for your local health department. These policies are developed by health department staff, not the board of health. Staff policies are those detailed policies within your health department that define how things are to be done in order to achieve the goals set by the board of health.

Slide 22

Operational Policies...

- Developed by local health department staff rather than board
- Define how things are to be done within the health department to achieve goals set by the board

Slide 23

Staff Policies...

- Affect individuals in the health department
- Usually do not need board approval

Staff policies affect individuals working in the local health department. These policies usually do not need board approval.

Slide 24

Staff Policies

- Examples:
 - Personnel policies
 - Establishing work teams
 - Determining staff schedules
 - Recommending merit raises

NCIPH 24

A good example of staff policies would be personnel policies. These policies specifically concern the staff. They focus on very specific, day-to-day issues of operation that affect individuals, and therefore are not your responsibility as a board member. Most personnel policies are set by the county and apply to all county employees.

Other examples of staff policies are—

- Establishing work teams
- Determining staff schedules for breaks and lunch to ensure that quality service is always available and
- Recommending merit raises

Slide 25

Discussion Questions

3. Can you think of any specific policies in your local health department that were developed by your board of health?
4. What about staff policies?

NCIPH 25

Discussion Questions:

3. Can you think of any specific policies in your local health department that were developed by your board of health?
4. What about staff policies?

Slide 26

Developing Effective Board Policies

- Written clearly and explicitly
- Free of jargon (say what you mean)
- Current
- Include the date
- Available to all
- Brief and specific

NCIPH 26

If the board needs to write a policy, it will be most effective if it is written clearly and explicitly. The policy should be free of jargon. In fact, it is essential to eliminate jargon and innuendo. In other words, say what you mean.

Policies should also be kept current. A board works from its policies, and should change them periodically, as needed, to meet its evolving needs. Be sure that the document includes the date when it was written and approved.

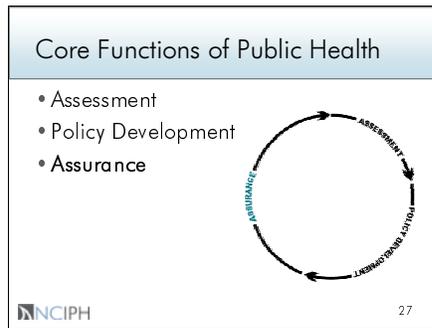
Since board policies are the voice of the board, they should be centrally available to all. For example, the bylaws and the strategic plan should be part of the manual for your board.

Finally, board policies should be brief and specific. Complexity can cause confusion and waste valuable organizational time and effort.

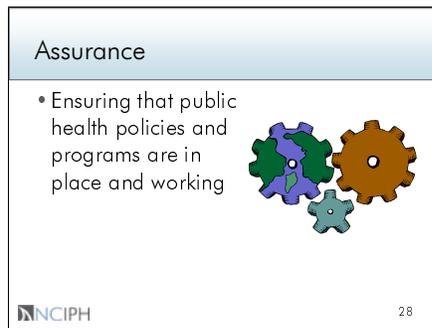
The job of a board of health is governance--the big picture. Board policies should reflect this focus.

We've now looked at the work of a board of health and its relationship to the local health department in terms of the first two core functions of public health: Assessment and Policy Development. Next, let's look at that work in terms of the third and final core function of public health: Assurance.

Slide 27



Slide 28



Assurance refers to those functions carried out by the board of health which ensure that public health policies and programs are in place and working.

Slide 29

Assurance

- Decision making process
- Approve a budget
- Keep minutes
- Attend meetings
- Follow procedures



NCIPH 29

A board practices assurance through its decision making process.

When your board members assume responsibility for critically evaluating issues and decisions, approve a budget, keep minutes for all official meetings, attend all meetings so there is a quorum to vote and follow Roberts Rules of Order or use The Suggested Rules of Procedure for Small Local Government Boards, they are practicing assurance. The Suggested Rules of Procedure for Small Local Government Boards is a UNC Institute of Government booklet written by A. Fleming Bell, II. Your health director should have a copy of this booklet.

Slide 30

Assurance

- Informs community of public health financial needs
- Support efforts for sound financial backing



NCIPH 30

A board of health practices assurance when it informs the community of public health financial needs.

It also practices assurance when it supports all efforts for sound financial backing of programs and services.

Slide 31

Assurance

- Anticipates trends likely to affect the health department or community



NCIPH 31

A board of health also practices assurance when it works with its health director to anticipate trends likely to affect the department or the community.

You will recall earlier in this presentation that the findings of a community assessment can help to clarify populations within the community and the health status of those populations. This type of information can provide you with important information about upcoming trends that are likely to affect the health department or community.

For example, several years ago, many health departments experienced a huge influx of Latinos into their communities. In some cases, the community health assessment may have provided signs that this influx was happening. When the board and health director can anticipate trends, it gives them the opportunity to plan and act. In this case, it meant finding the resources to hire staff who can speak Spanish. Your board practices assurance when it supports the provision of services to people who do not speak English.

Slide 32

Assurance

- Ensuring that public health services are provided
 - Even if services are provided by other organizations



NCIPH 32

Not every health department is able to or should provide all of the services that are needed to protect and preserve the health of the public.

In many instances, some services, such as primary care, dental care or animal control were once part of the health department and are now provided by other organizations or agencies in the community. While the health department is not the direct provider, it assures that the services are available. Generally, where there may be enough providers of a particular service already (for example: dentists, including those who will accept Medicaid), the service may be assured rather than provided by the health department.

In short, assurance is seeing that appropriate public health services are provided to the community--even when that means that another organization in the community is providing the service.

Slide 33

Discussion Questions

5. Do you know if your local health department provides primary care? Dental care? Animal control? Home health?
6. Do you know if your local health department has a translator or interpreter on staff?

NCIPH 33

Discussion Questions:

5. Do you know if your local health department provides primary care? Dental care? Animal control? Home health?
6. Do you know if your local health department has a translator or interpreter on staff or otherwise available to the staff (e.g., contract, telephone interpretation service, etc.)?

Slide 34

Discussion Questions
7. Are you aware of any services that were once provided by your health department that are now only available through some other organization? If so, how did this come about?
 34

Discussion Questions:

7. Are you aware of any services that were once provided by your health department that are now only available through some other organization? If so, how did this come about?

Slide 35

Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three core functions of public health represent crucial aspects of your board's activities and responsibilities<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Assessment– Policy Development– Assurance
 35

As you can see, each of the three core functions of public health: assessment, policy development and assurance (as defined in the 1988 Institute of Medicine Report “The Future of Public Health”) represent crucial aspects of your board’s activities and responsibilities.

In the next part of this section, we will examine the connection between the work of a board of health, the core functions, and the ten essential services of public health.