**The Council on Linkages
Between Academia and
Public Health Practice**

Use of the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals for Health Department Performance Improvement and Public Health Accreditation Board Accreditation

June 2016

The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals (Core Competencies) are a consensus set of skills for the broad practice of public health, as defined by the 10 Essential Public Health Services. Developed by the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice (Council on Linkages), the Core Competencies are used by state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments across the country to better understand, assess, and meet education, training, and other workforce development needs. This summary details a variety of ways that the Core Competencies are supporting health departments in improving performance and achieving accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB).

Uses of the Core Competencies for PHAB Accreditation
- The Core Competencies are referenced in the PHAB Standards and Measures Version 1.5 within Domain 8: Maintain a Competent Public Health Workforce. Specifically, the Core Competencies appear within the guidance instructions for Standard 8.2, Measure 8.2.1 A:
  - Standard 8.2: Ensure a competent workforce through assessment of staff competencies, the provision of individual training and professional development, and the provision of a supportive work environment
    - Measure 8.2.1 A: Workforce development strategies
      - This measure assesses health departments' planning for employee training, implementation of those plans, and the development of core competencies, and requires the provision of a workforce development plan that includes an assessment of staff competencies. The Core Competencies are the sole set of competencies listed as an example of nationally adopted core competencies that may be used for this assessment.
- Data obtained from PHAB indicate that at least 50 health departments have integrated the Core Competencies into the workforce development plans that they submitted for accreditation purposes. This number may be larger, as these data reflect only those workforce development plans that explicitly cited the Core Competencies.
- The Council on Linkages has collected 15 examples of workforce development plans that integrate the Core Competencies; 12 of these plans were developed by health departments that are accredited.
- In addition to competency-based workforce development plans, PHAB also requires health departments to provide position descriptions or job descriptions that include the competencies required for the position, including generalist needs for the position. This requirement is found in Standard 8.2, Measure 8.2.2 A:
  - Standard 8.2: Ensure a competent workforce through assessment of staff competencies, the provision of individual training and professional development, and the provision of a supportive work environment
    - Measure 8.2.2 A: A competent health department workforce
      - This measure assesses health departments' execution related to workforce development plans. The Core Competencies can be used to describe generalist competency needs for positions.

- The Council on Linkages has collected 25 examples of job descriptions that integrate the Core Competencies; 19 of these job descriptions were developed by health departments that are accredited.
- Health departments have expressed a desire for technical assistance (TA) related to the process of developing and improving workforce development plans and incorporating competencies into job descriptions.

Additional Uses of the Core Competencies for Performance Improvement
- The Core Competencies are the focus of three Healthy People 2020 objectives within the Public Health Infrastructure topic area:
    - PHI-1: Increase the proportion of Federal, Tribal, State, and local public health agencies that incorporate Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals into job descriptions and performance evaluations
    - PHI-2: Increase the proportion of Tribal, State, and local public health personnel who receive continuing education consistent with the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals
    - PHI-3: Increase the proportion of Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accredited schools of public health, CEPH accredited academic programs, and schools of nursing (with a public health or community health component) that integrate Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals into curricula
        - Preliminary data related to Healthy People 2020 Objective PHI-3 collected in May and June 2016 show that 105 of 114 academic institutions reporting on this objective use the Core Competencies.
- Data collected by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials through its 2012 ASTHO Profile Survey and reported in *ASTHO Profile of State Public Health, Volume Three* show that the Core Competencies are used by state health departments in the following ways:
    - 52% use the Core Competencies to develop training plans
    - 25% use the Core Competencies to prepare job descriptions
    - 15% use the Core Competencies to conduct performance evaluations
    - 17% use the Core Competencies in capacities other than those listed above
- Data collected by the National Association of County and City Health Officials through its 2013 Profile Study indicate that 26% of local health departments use the Core Competencies. Data show that the Core Competencies are used by local health departments in the following ways:
    - 18% use the Core Competencies to assess staff training needs
    - 14% use the Core Competencies to develop staff training plans
    - 14% use the Core Competencies to conduct staff performance evaluations
    - 13% use the Core Competencies to write position descriptions
- The Core Competencies serve as the foundation for, or align with, numerous sets of discipline-specific public health competencies, including the Core Competencies for Performance Improvement Managers, Quad Council Competencies for Public Health Nurses, Competencies for Public Health Informaticians, Public Health Preparedness and Response Core Competency Model, Competencies for Applied Epidemiologists in Governmental Public Health Agencies, and Competency Guidelines for Public Health Laboratory Professionals. Over the past year, the Core Competencies have been used in the development of four additional competency sets:
    - Competencies for Performance Improvement Professionals in Public Health (Draft)

- The Competencies for Performance Improvement Professionals in Public Health are a set of skills desirable for performance improvement professionals working in public health. Based on the Core Competencies and the Core Competencies for Performance Improvement Managers, the Competencies for Performance Improvement Professionals in Public Health were developed to offer additional guidance in performance improvement for individuals with responsibilities for accreditation, quality improvement, performance management, or community improvement in public health.
- Priority Competencies for Population Health Professionals (Draft)
  - The Priority Competencies for Population Health Professionals describe desired skills for population health professionals and are primarily designed for professionals in hospitals and health systems engaged in non-clinical population health activities, such as community health needs assessments, community health improvement plans, and implementation of community-based interventions.
- Including People with Disabilities: Public Health Workforce Competencies
  - Developed by a national committee comprised of disability and public health experts convened by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, the Including People with Disabilities: Public Health Workforce Competencies outline recent advances in knowledge and practice skills that public health professionals need to include people with disabilities in the core public health functions of assessment, policy development, and assurance.
- Community Health Worker Competencies (Draft)
  - Developed by a national expert panel convened by Tulane University, the Community Health Worker Competencies are designed to provide standardized general competencies for community health workers.

- Since the release of the current version of the Core Competencies in June 2014, the Core Competencies have been accessed from the Public Health Foundation (PHF) website more than 92,000 times. In addition, resources and tools available online to assist with use of the Core Competencies were accessed more than 170,000 times over the same time period.
- Assessments based on the Core Competencies provided by the Council on Linkages to help individuals and organizations measure competence and determine priority areas for training are the most heavily accessed of the Council on Linkages' Core Competencies resources and tools.
- Of the 55 distance TA requests focused on the Core Competencies received by PHF from July 2015-June 2016, 26 were from health departments.
- The Core Competencies are integrated into the TRAIN learning network, which includes 25 state health department portals; 1 local health department portal; portals for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC TRAIN), Medical Reserve Corps (MRC-TRAIN), and Veterans Health Administration (VHA TRAIN); and a National TRAIN portal, and provides over 1 million learners with access to competency-based training. Course providers are able to assign relevant competencies to their course offerings, and learners can search by competencies and competency domains to identify relevant courses.
  - Within National TRAIN alone, over 1,300 courses designed for health departments indicate the Core Competencies addressed by these courses.

- The Public Health Training Centers use the Core Competencies to assess training needs and develop training for the public health workforce.
- The Core Competencies have been used by CEPH in its development of the accreditation criteria for schools and programs of public health.
- The Core Competencies contribute to the framework for CDC fellowship programs.
- The Core Competencies serve as the basis for discussions of the 21 member organizations of the Council on Linkages focused on public health workforce development. These discussions lead to consensus development and action to build skills and competence of the public health workforce. The Core Competencies offer a useful framework for the Council on Linkages, its member organizations, and others to discuss national public health workforce development needs and strategies to address those needs.

For additional information and resources related to the Core Competencies, please visit www.phf.org/aboutcorecompetencies. Information about other ways that the Core Competencies are being used may be shared with the Council on Linkages by contacting Kathleen Amos at kamos@phf.org.