

COLORADO PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH NETWORK

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Determining the Cost of Select Core Services Across Colorado Public Health Agencies

Public health continues to be chronically underfunded while it has been proven time and again to be one of the best investments to improve health in the US. In order to ensure that public health is truly valued, is not passed over in funding decisions and is seen as an invaluable partner in the health system, we must first understand the cost of the delivery of public health services in local public health agencies.

Project Summary: This project studies the cost of delivery of one or more of Colorado's designated core services. In October 2011 core public health services, which were called for in the Public Health Act of 2008, were promulgated into rule. This research project will measure the variable and fixed estimated costs of delivering core public health services in Colorado and to identify services and delivery characteristics with economies of scale and scope. The services we will focus on at this time will be Communicable Disease Surveillance and Physical Activity and Nutrition.

The cost estimate will be done in a four step process including selection of which core service(s) will be used for the cost calculation, key informant interviews and focus groups to map workflow and identify cost components (variable and fixed costs) to be used within the estimation, time logs and surveys to estimate variable costs, and analysis of the data to determine how and why costs may differ across various agencies.

Relevance to Practice: Though Core Services were delineated in October 2011, several of those core services remain unfunded or underfunded. Local and state public health agency leaders have made arguments to increase funding to local public health in core services areas. Without the knowledge of the cost to deliver the core services, the arguments often fall short and are not reinforced with data and uniform information. This project will provide public health professionals across Colorado the much needed data on the cost of core public health service delivery. Once cost can be estimated and presented alongside marked improvements in health outcomes, the value of public health becomes even clearer to decision makers and funders.

Additionally, this project will provide data and information to public health partners as they work to understand the role of local public health agencies in the Affordable Care Act (ACA). In order to become necessary partners in the implementation of the ACA and in the health of communities, public health leaders will need to be armed with answers to how much it costs to deliver public health services in their communities.

Project Advisory Committee: The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) will be made up of practice and research professionals including, but not limited to, representatives from Colorado local public health agencies, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Colorado School of Public Health, national experts who are familiar with cost estimation and public health service delivery and Colorado practice professionals with expertise in the selected core service area.

Research Team: Colorado School of Public Health and Colorado Public Health Practice-Based Research Network, housed at the Colorado Association for Local Public Health Officials (CALPHO).

Funding Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Timeframe: August 2013 – January 2015

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