

21st Century Public Health Transformation

MISSOURI

Missouri is in the Midwestern region of the United States and has a population of 6.1 million people. The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is an independent agency and has a decentralized relationship with local health departments in the state. Missouri envisions improved health and quality of life for Missourians of all ages by providing information and education, effective regulation and oversight, quality services, and surveillance of diseases and conditions.

Transformation Approach

#HealthierMO is a grassroots initiative, drawing energy and direction from local public health agencies and public health system stakeholders, with the goal of transforming Missouri's public health system from within. The organization is building a stronger, more resilient public health system that will be more responsive to the needs of Missourians to ensure that each community has a skilled public health workforce, a strong network of partners, stable funding streams, policies, and a reliable system for service delivery.

Transformation & Equity Activities

Missouri created its own model of the Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS), which defines a minimum set of fundamental capabilities and areas of public health expertise that must be available in every community. Missouri's FPHS model specifically calls out Health Equity and Social Determinants of Health as a lens through which all public health services should be assured. Missouri is launching a multi-step process that supports public health agencies in operationalizing the FPHS model to assure health equity for all Missourians. #HealthierMO is looking into options and doing pre-planning work with the hopes to do costing assessment in the future.

Learnings & Next Steps

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly slowed progress on public health system transformation, as state and local public health agencies were completely immersed in pandemic response. However, challenges during COVID-19 motivated agencies and organizations in Missouri to change their public health system to ensure health equity for everyone in their communities. Missouri's FPHS model has been used by multiple groups as a framework for recommendations and transformation. Examples include use by the Governor's Transformation Task Force, by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services in strategic planning, in the George Washington University report to provide recommendations to transform our public health system, and by various professional organizations in Missouri.

In collaboration with storytellers at Humans of St. Louis, #HealthierMO developed a photostory series called Hope for a Healthier Tomorrow. It is a collection of stories from Missourians across the state highlighting gaps in the healthcare system, the urgent need for change, and the passion to create a brighter tomorrow for all Missourians. These stories highlight the need to assure that every Missourian has access to foundational public health programs and services. Excerpts from the series are included in #HealthierMO's health equity training to demonstrate the value of community partnerships to address social determinants of health and assure health equity.

In 2020, #HealthierMO collaborated with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services to complete a capacity assessment based on Missouri's FPHS model. Assessment data showed the level of per capita funding for local public health agencies drives capacity. Differences were not found in rural vs urban communities, number of personnel, or other financial variables. However, the level of per capita funding distinguished local public health agencies with capacity from those without. Data also showed capacity in the capabilities is a strong predictor of capacity in the areas of expertise. Local public health agencies with higher capacity in the capabilities are 2.3 times more likely to have higher capacity in the areas of expertise. Data also showed that administrators with less than two years of experience in their role were less likely to be able to assure the capabilities defined in the FPHS model. In the past two years, Missouri experienced significant turnover in local public health administrators, leaving 33.9% of current administrators with less than two years of experience in the role.

With expertise and input from a partner, Consilience Group LLC, and our Health Equity Design Team, #HealthierMO developed a capacity building program that was launched in May 2022. "An FPHS Approach to Improving Well-being for All Missourians" is a multi-step process that equips public health agencies to operationalize the FPHS model in order to assure health equity for all Missourians. The first component is an online asynchronous training that provides foundational definitions for health equity, health disparities, and social determinants of health specific to Missouri and related to the FPHS model. The second step is a facilitated workshop for public health agencies, where public health professionals do a deep dive on health equity practices in their agencies and are taken step-by-step through the FPHS Workbook, which is a preparation tool for agencies to build capacity and conduct action planning. Agencies will learn how to operationalize the health equity training and the FPHS model within their work. The final step is for agencies to implement the FPHS model. Technical assistance and support will be provided by the #HealthierMO team as agencies move through this process. This capacity building program provides tools and resources to help local health departments operationalize the model within their work to address health inequities and assure Foundational Public Health Services for all Missourians.

As federal dollars become available to the public health system, Missouri's public health system feels the urgency to have a costing assessment performed to identify the baseline cost for moving all local public health agencies in Missouri up to at least assuring the foundational public health capabilities identified in Missouri's FPHS model. Data from national level studies on public health workforce are helpful, but Missouri-specific data are needed to acquire funding for this vital work.

Recommendations & Call to Action

#HealthierMO has learned many things from their grassroots approach, but one of the more important pieces that is often overlooked is to ensure that you bring ALL diverse partners to the table – all voices, all people, all stakeholders. This means including diversity, non-traditional partners, and being intentional in collaboration. Transparency throughout the transformation process is vital to ensure that all system partners and stakeholders understand the goals, vision, and strategies to help foster buy-in to the transformation process. It is important for stakeholders to be actively engaged in the work and for their voices to be valued in directing and informing transformation work.

Many local public health agencies are thinking ahead as to what the future looks like for them. Public health professionals know that we cannot continue doing what we were pre-pandemic. The landscape of public health has changed, and we know that we need to do differently to move forward."

Emily Fessler, Project Manager, #HealthierMO