

21st Century Public Health Transformation

NEVADA

Nevada is in the Western region of the United States and has a population of 3.1 million people. The Nevada Department of Health and Human Services is a superagency with a Division of Public and Behavioral Health and has a hybrid approach to public health administration with local health departments. The state is responsible for providing a handful of public health services statewide and all public health services in rural areas of the state. Three local health authorities are responsible for providing all other public health services in the urban areas of the state. Nevada envisions a better defined and more comprehensive public health system that includes rural multi-county health districts to address and ensure equitable access and delivery of services.

Transformation Approach

Nevada is leveraging accreditation and increased attention, funding, and understanding of public health to transform its public health system. The three local health authorities are accredited and the state's Division of Public and Behavioral Health recently developed a comprehensive accreditation plan that outlines its commitment, activities, and approach for achieving accreditation. Through its commitment and investment in accreditation, Nevada plans to use accreditation as a means to achieve lasting, systemic changes; develop a culture of continuous quality improvement; and enhance performance management to better promote and protect the health of all Nevadans. Accreditation will support Nevada in achieving its vision and advancing equity across the state.

In addition, the state is leveraging the current attention on and funding for public health to enhance public health infrastructure statewide, address workforce shortages, improve the public health workforce pipeline, and make up for decades of chronic underfunding. By maximizing existing opportunities and resources, Nevada is creating the framework to support the public health system of the future. which includes growing and developing a statewide laboratory network; expanding academic health department collaborations to align public health academia and practice for seamless workforce pipeline efforts, research, training, and policy; enhancing services and developing infrastructure in Nevada's rural counties; improving capacity to address health equity and access to services for vulnerable Nevadans; and renewing its focus on quality improvement. Ultimately, these changes will create a healthier Nevada.

Transformation & Equity Activities

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the importance of robust public health systems and infrastructure. It exposed various challenges and opportunities and necessitated a level of coordination and communication, collaboration and partnership not previously required. It also highlighted and intensified population-level health inequities in access to and quality of care—as well as health outcomes—that have existed for years. Nevada is currently working to capitalize on the lessons learned, improvements made, and growth experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic to strategically improve the physical infrastructure and partnerships necessary to make permanent and sustainable improvements for the state—creating the healthiest conditions possible for Nevadans to live, learn, work, and play.

In addition, Nevada is working to expand public health capacity in rural areas of the state by offering training and support to county health officers and county boards of health and creating a multi-county rural public health district in order to enhance local decision-making and support the maximum number of services to the largest number of people. By leveraging funds and financial resources with neighboring counties, these efforts will facilitate the expansion of resources and will expand reach to small, dispersed, and diverse populations in rural communities. Complementing this rural health district is the development of a rural public health laboratory as part of the state's effort to develop a statewide public health lab network in coordination with the Nevada State Public Health Lab.

Nevada is also taking numerous steps, including expanding academic health departments, to improve, grow, and diversify the public health workforce.

Through Nevada's transformation approach and activities, the state will increase its capacity and its capabilities to promote and protect the health of its residents through accreditation, increased collaboration, and enhancing public health infrastructure and systems in both urban and rural areas of the state. As a result, Nevada's public health system will be more robust, better able to respond to local needs, and prepared to not only continue leading the COVID-19 response, but also be prepared to address future public health crises.

Currently, all three local health authorities are actively working to advance health equity. One of the aims of Nevada's participation is develop a more unified, statewide approach to advancing health equity in order to maximize impact for a larger portion of Nevadans, including efforts to address health disparities between rural and urban regions of the state.

Outcomes & Plan

Nevada is in the early phases of public health transformation and modernization efforts and, thus, has no outcomes to report at this time.

Call to Action

Building on public health wins during the 2021 session of the Nevada State Legislature, the Nevada team is utilizing the 21C initiative in 2022 to prioritize and build bipartisan, statewide support for public health legislation in the upcoming 2023 legislative session (the Nevada legislature meets every other year in odd years).

"The Nevada team believes that we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address the numerous shortcomings of our state's public health system. Participating in 21C will allow Nevada to leverage current, short term federal resources and incorporate best practices from other states engaged in public health transformation and modernization."

John Packham, PhD, Office of Statewide Initiatives, University of Nevada, Reno School of Medicine