

# Policy for PHAB Pathways Recognition Program For Military Installation Departments of Public Health

*A Step Toward Performance  
Improvement and Accreditation*



*Adopted January 2024*

“This publication was developed under the direction of the Defense Centers for Public Health-Aberdeen (DCPH-A), Defense Health Agency Public Health (DHA Public Health), and as a result of collaboration between DCPH-A and the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), to provide supplemental guidance to the national *PHAB Standards & Measures for Pathways Recognition, Version 2022* to reflect military terminology, operations, and scope of practice within the installation departments of public health serving Army locations (Contract # W81K0422D0018). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Department of Defense, the Defense Health Agency, the Department of the Army, or the U.S. Government. The mention of any non-federal entity and/or its products is for informational purposes only, and is not to be construed or interpreted, in any manner, as federal endorsement of that non-federal entity or its products.”

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# I. INTRODUCTION

This policy document presents the process for seeking and obtaining recognition through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) Pathways Recognition Program. The Pathways Recognition Program is intended to give smaller and historically under-resourced public health departments the tools necessary to place those departments in a position—after achievement of the Pathways Recognition Program—to move on to seek full accreditation within 2 years. Note that completion of the Pathways Recognition Program on its own does not confer accreditation status on a health department. For the purposes of this Policy, the term “health department” will include Military Installation Departments of Public Health.

PHAB is the national accrediting organization for public health departments. PHAB is dedicated to advancing and transforming public health practice by championing performance improvement, strong infrastructure, and innovation. PHAB’s vision is a high-performing governmental public health system that supports all people living their healthiest lives.

With support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), PHAB has worked with public health practitioners and experts to develop and continually improve the national accreditation program. Incorporated in May 2007, PHAB works closely with national organizations that represent the wide variety of public health departments and structures across the country. These partners include but are not limited to the American Public Health Association (APHA), the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH), the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI), the Public Health Foundation (PHF), and the de Beaumont Foundation. The Pathways Recognition Program was developed and launched in 2022, with support from CDC and the collaboration of national partners.

Following the release of [PHAB’s Pathways Recognition Program](#), including the [Standards and Measures for Pathways Recognition, Version 2022](#) (referred to as “The Standards” in this document) and [Policy for Pathways Recognition](#) in February 2022, PHAB engaged with the Defense Centers for Public Health – Aberdeen (DCPH-A) in September 2022 to develop supplemental guidance tailored to support Military Installation Departments of Public Health, with a current focus on select departments that serve Army locations. Together, PHAB and the DCPH-A reviewed The Standards, considering opportunities to further develop clarifying guidance and examples reflective of public health programs, services, functions, and operations within the context of Military Installation Departments of Public Health and Army installations. In addition, the supplemental guidance was informed by site visit reports and experiences compiled from Military Installation Departments of Public Health serving Army locations that have achieved initial accreditation.

Public health department recognition through the Pathways Recognition Program consists of the adoption of a set of standards, a process to assess health departments’ performance against them, and recognition for those departments that meet the requirements. The Pathways Recognition Program standards (The Standards) are a subset of those found in PHAB’s *Standards and Measures for Initial Accreditation Version 2022*. The Pathways Recognition process and standards are intended to be flexible and inclusive to accommodate many different configurations of public health departments at all governmental levels, including Military Installation Departments of Public Health.

Pathways-Recognized health departments demonstrate accountability to their stakeholders. The goal of the program is to help public health departments assess their current capacity and guide them to continuously improve that capacity, working toward accreditation, and thus promoting a healthier population.

## Standards & Measures

Pathways Recognition demonstrates that public health departments, including Military Installation Departments of Public Health, possess certain key capabilities as outlined in the Foundational Public Health

Services (FPHS). The FPHS framework outlines the unique responsibilities of governmental public health and defines a minimum set of capabilities that must be available in every community. In general, The Standards referenced in this document collectively refer to the introductory material, domains, measures, required documentation and guidance set forth by PHAB for the Pathways Recognition Program. Pathways Recognition only applies to The Standards and does not address local political or personnel issues.

**The Standards for the Pathways Recognition Program constitute a subset of The Standards established by PHAB for initial accreditation** with input from public health practitioners with wide-ranging public health expertise, including: a Standards Development Workgroup; a Tribal Standards Workgroup; and various PHAB Think Tanks and expert panels with subject matter expertise to address specific topics. The Standards are revised over time. All revisions of The Standards are made with input from public health practitioners and experts and with oversight from the Accreditation Improvement Committee. The Accreditation Improvement Committee is comprised of practitioners and PHAB Board members. All proposed revisions are vetted in the field before they are presented to the PHAB Board of Directors for adoption.

From 2014 to 2019, PHAB collaborated with U.S. Army public health practitioners under the direction of the U.S. Army Public Health Center, U.S. Army Medical Command (now known as the Defense Centers for Public Health-Aberdeen, Defense Health Agency) to develop an adapted version of The Standards, the Army Public Health Initial Accreditation, Standards and Measures, Version 1.5., along with a corresponding Acronyms & Glossary of Terms. These publications were originally adapted for what were then referred to as Army Installation Departments of Public Health.

In 2022, DCPH-A contracted with PHAB to develop supplemental guidance specific to Military Installation Departments of Public Health with focus at this time on those departments serving a specific set of Army locations. While the requirements within The Standards (for initial, reaccreditation, and the Pathways Recognition Program) remain in force and applicable to Military Installation Departments of Public Health, the supplement offers guidance reflective of Military Installation Department of Public Health serving Army locations' structures, functions, and operations, as well as the array of programs, services, and initiatives provided to the installation community.

For Pathways Recognition, The Standards are divided into two tracks: (1) Services and Partnerships and (2) Health Department Systems. The Services and Partnerships Track is comprised of the Foundational Capabilities measures from initial accreditation domains 1–7. The Health Department Systems Track is comprised of the Foundational Capabilities measures from initial accreditation domains 8–10. Applicants may apply for one or both tracks and may choose to complete them sequentially or simultaneously. However, to receive Pathways Recognition, applicants must successfully complete both tracks. Health departments that choose to move from Pathways Recognition to initial accreditation may be eligible to carry over measures assessed and scores from Pathways to initial accreditation under certain circumstances, as described in this Policy.

Pathways Recognition is intended to provide structured learning opportunities and feedback for those health departments interested in pursuing initial accreditation at a future point in time. PHAB has developed incentives for those health departments moving from Pathways Recognition to initial accreditation, as described in the "Moving Toward Accreditation" section of this Policy.

## Additional Information

This document can be found on the PHAB website – [www.phaboard.org](http://www.phaboard.org). The sections entitled "For More Information" reference additional resources, including tip sheets and online courses. These resources may be updated as new information becomes available. Military Installation Department of Public Health Accreditation Coordinators and other personnel are encouraged to use these resources.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION****[phaboard.org/pathways](https://phaboard.org/pathways)**

For more information about the **Pathways Recognition Program**, including benefits, visit **[phaboard.org/pathways](https://phaboard.org/pathways)**

## II. APPLICABILITY OF THIS POLICY

PHAB will periodically revise this policy and The Standards. This 2023 version of the policy for Military Installation Department of Public Health (the “2023 Policy-Installation”) was adopted by the PHAB Board on June 9, 2023. It applies to any Military Installation Department of Public Health serving an Army location that is applying for Pathways Recognition under Version 2022 of the PHAB Standards & Measures for Pathways Recognition. The 2023 Policy remains in full force and effect until a new version of the policy is approved by the PHAB Board. The version of the Policy and The Standards applicable to a health department at the time it begins the Pathways Recognition process is applicable throughout the duration of the respective health department’s cycle unless the health department, the DCPH-A, and PHAB mutually agree that a different version will apply. If PHAB amends any provision in the 2023 Policy, it will take reasonable efforts to notify the point of contact for each health department registered in PHAB’s electronic system (ePHAB) to which the change in policy pertains.

## III. ELIGIBILITY FOR PATHWAYS

The entity that has the primary statutory or legal responsibility for public health in a Tribe, state, territory, or at the local level, or Military Installation Department of Public Health is eligible to apply for Pathways Recognition. To be eligible, such entities must operate in a manner consistent with applicable federal, Tribal, state, territorial, and local statutes or military regulations or Department of Defense equivalent. PHAB will determine the applicant’s eligibility to apply for Pathways Recognition. A health department must meet one of the definitions below to be eligible to apply for Pathways Recognition.

**Health departments are encouraged to discuss with PHAB any instances where they have questions about how The Standards or eligibility criteria apply given their organizational structure.**

### **Military Installation Department of Public Health**

For the purposes of Pathways Recognition, the “Military Installation Department of Public Health” is defined as the entity responsible for local military installation public health services. “Military Installation Department of Public Health” refers to the departments located at the installation (“installation-level”). Although most of these entities will use the Installation Department of Public Health nomenclature, the actual name may vary for some locations due to local considerations and scope of services (e.g., multiple installations may be included in the department name of the installation, which may be a Joint base, and the department is named as such). Activities related to public health services in an operational (deployed) environment are excluded for the purposes of public health department accreditation and Pathways Recognition.

Further, the activities of Veterinary Services, which have been part of the military public health enterprise, are not reviewed in PHAB accreditation or the Pathways Recognition Program, although an installation Veterinary Clinic may partner with a Military Installation Department of Public Health.

## Umbrella Organizations

Health departments may apply for Pathways Recognition if they are part of an umbrella organization, super public health agency, or super agency that oversees public health functions in addition to other governmental functions. However, PHAB will review and provide Pathways Recognition to only the public health function of the umbrella organization. The Military Installation Department of Public Health may be part of a larger organization with higher chains of command (e.g., military medical treatment facility (MTF)) and may utilize the policies, procedures, or functions of those organizations and commands. For example, the Military Installation Department of Public Health may utilize the human resources (HR) system of the organization of which it is a part, such as the MTF, or Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC), or that of another identified support agency. In this case, the documentation for “human resource policy and procedures manual or individual policies” would be the policies and procedures of the applicable organization or support agency.

If an applicant is part of a broader umbrella organization, the review will focus on the public health functions, as defined by the 10 Essential Public Health Services. All organizational policies (e.g., confidentiality, HR), plans (e.g., strategic plan), and systems (e.g., performance management system) provided as documentation to PHAB must apply to the division of the organization that carries out public health functions (i.e., the Military Installation Department of Public Health), regardless of whether they apply to the entire umbrella organization. Because PHAB’s review is limited to the public health function (i.e., PHAB does not provide a comprehensive review to ensure that the policies, plans, and systems apply across the umbrella organization as a whole), the scope of PHAB’s Pathways Recognition is limited to the public health function(s), as defined by the 10 Essential Public Health Services, and does not cover the entire umbrella organization.

The accountability for meeting the measures rests with the Military Installation Department of Public Health under Pathways Recognition review. The department must provide evidence of meeting the measure, even if such documentation is produced by an umbrella agency of which the Military Installation Department of Public Health is a part. In these instances, it is advisable for the department to include an explanation of how the functions, policies, or procedures of the umbrella organization apply to and are used by the Military Installation Department of Public Health.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on **eligibility**, including how to learn more about the applicability of the program in your jurisdiction, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## IV. OVERARCHING POLICIES

### Terms and Conditions

A Military Installation Department of Public Health applicant must agree to the applicable PHAB Pathways Recognition Terms and Conditions agreement, which must be electronically signed upon submitting application for consideration under the Pathways Recognition Program (the “Application”). As part of the Terms and Conditions, the Chief/Director or Deputy Chief/Director of the applicant Military Installation Department of Public Health will attest to the accuracy and validity of, and assume full responsibility for, the content of the Application and all documentation and information used by the applicant throughout the Pathways Recognition process. The applicant will acknowledge and agree that PHAB reserves the right to verify any or all the information. Providing false, misleading, inaccurate, or incomplete information or otherwise violating the rules governing the Pathways Recognition Program may constitute grounds for the rejection of the Application, denial of Pathways Recognition, revocation of Recognition status, or other appropriate disciplinary action.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

To read the Pathways Recognition **Terms and Conditions**, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## Confidentiality

The Military Installation Department of Public Health applicant acknowledges and agrees that PHAB will undertake reasonable efforts to keep information exchanged throughout the Pathways Recognition review process confidential to the review process, except to the extent that PHAB might be required by law, statute, rule, or regulation to disclose such information.

Confidential information includes:

- Any and all of the health department's documentation;
- All discussions held by Review Team;
- Contents of the final report delivered to the health department (the "Pathways Report");  
and
- Membership of the Review Team.

Except as otherwise stated in this policy or prohibited by applicable law, the applicant may make their own decisions about disclosure of information used for and received during the recognition process. They may not, however, disclose to any third party any information regarding the identity of the Review Team members.

PHAB will provide the assigned Department of Defense Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) and the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team with a list of decisions ("recognized" or "not recognized"). PHAB will also publish the list of Pathways-Recognized health departments, including basic information such as location, date that Recognition status was conferred, health department type, population, and version of The Standards.

In addition, to support the evidence base for public health practice, PHAB will make aggregate, anonymized information gathered through the Pathways Recognition process (e.g., assessments of conformity) available to the public or may share recognition data with identifiers to researchers who follow PHAB's data use agreement process and confidentiality requirements. Information about data for research purposes is available on the PHAB website. Health departments may also be able to opt in to sharing additional data with other health departments for the purpose of shared learning.

Review Team members are instructed to not discuss the applicant health department or any of its documentation with others not involved in the health department's Pathways Recognition process.

At all times, health departments are solely responsible for abiding by all applicable state and federal laws as well as military regulations or policies regarding personal or sensitive information. For example, for personnel-related requirements, state or federal law may require the health department to redact the names of employees. In addition, state or federal laws may prohibit disclosing personal health information to PHAB (including through ePHAB). PHAB cannot provide advice regarding a health department's particular obligations under applicable law. As such, health departments should seek counsel for complying with applicable privacy laws.



## Fees

As of this document's publication, fees to apply for Pathways Recognition are centrally paid for by the DCPH-A/DHA for Military Installation Departments of Public Health serving select Army locations. Asterisks (\*) indicate specific fee references covered within this Policy.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

To view the **fee schedule**, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## Evaluation

For PHAB's continuous quality improvement of the Pathways Recognition process, courses, and supporting guides and documents, PHAB conducts evaluation activities and may contract with an external evaluator to gather additional feedback. PHAB or its contractor may ask health departments to complete surveys or participate in interviews or focus groups. It is through evaluations that the health departments are provided opportunities to submit comments and recommendations concerning The Standards, the Pathways Report, the Review Team, the Recognition process, or any aspect of their Pathways Recognition experience. PHAB uses the findings of its evaluations to make decisions regarding all components of the Pathways Recognition process. All applicant health departments are expected to participate in PHAB's evaluation process. Findings from the evaluations that are shared publicly do not identify individuals or organizations. Evaluation content from the health department is not shared with the Accreditation Committee, and comments do not affect the accreditation or Pathways Recognition decision. The DCPH-A/DHA Public Health may also conduct an evaluation specific to Military Installation Departments of Public Health experiences or outcomes related to the Pathways Recognition process and designation. These are separate from PHAB's evaluation activities.

## Technical Assistance

Health departments should direct all questions on the Pathways Recognition process and The Standards to PHAB. PHAB staff is available to provide technical assistance on issues involving the Recognition process; the e-PHAB information system; required forms; meaning of terms used; and interpretation of the standards, measures, and documentation guidance. PHAB is responsible for providing training to applicants on the Recognition process and the selection of documentation that demonstrates conformity with The Standards.

PHAB has resources and courses available to health departments preparing and applying for Pathways Recognition. PHAB will designate specific courses that are required during the Preparation step (see "Pathways Recognition Process" in this Policy).

Through the Pathways Recognition Program, applicant health departments will also have access to peer learning and additional technical assistance opportunities through a Learning Community approach shared with all applicant health departments that apply during the same time period.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on **technical assistance**, including the PHAB Learning Center, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

# V. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

## A. Health Department

### Department of Public Health Chief or Director

The Health Department Chief or Director for PHAB Pathways Recognition purposes may either be the health department's top executive and/or the installation's public health authority. The Military Installation Department of Public Health may refer to this position as the Department of Public Health Chief or Director, or similar, which is the position referred to through this document, as the "Health Department Director". The top executive is defined as the highest-ranking employee with administrative and managerial authority at the level of the health department.

The Health Department Director is responsible for attesting to the accuracy of the information submitted to PHAB as demonstrated by authorizing the submission of materials through PHAB's electronic information system, e-PHAB. This includes the Application and all documentation (documentation submission, reopened measures).

### Accreditation Coordinator

Health departments pursuing Pathways Recognition are required to appoint one person as a point of contact for PHAB, termed the Accreditation Coordinator. The Accreditation Coordinator may be the Health Department Director. However, PHAB recommends that, when possible, the Accreditation Coordinator be somebody other than the Health Department Director and that a Pathways Recognition Team be established to contribute throughout the Recognition process.

The Accreditation Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the Pathways Recognition process within the health department and is the primary communication contact between the health department and PHAB throughout the entire Recognition process. It is the responsibility of the health department to ensure e-PHAB is updated if any contact information changes.

While the health department must designate the Health Department Director and Accreditation Coordinator, the health department can also designate other staff members who will have access to e-PHAB.

### Appointing Authority

The appointing authority is the person with the power to hire the chief or director of the health department.

The term "commander," as it pertains to the governance of the Military Installation Department of Public Health, is specific to the commander to whom the chief or director of the Military Installation Department of Public Health reports (MTF Commander, or other designated Commander, for example), unless otherwise specified. The appointing authority is responsible for providing a letter of support to apply for Pathways Recognition.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on **selecting an Accreditation Coordinator**, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources). Although not required, PHAB strongly encourages health departments to use a Pathways Recognition Team throughout the process.

## B. PHAB Accreditation Specialist

PHAB Accreditation Specialists will be available to provide technical assistance concerning the Pathways Recognition process and interpretation of The Standards. Accreditation Specialists are employed by PHAB and are experienced public health professionals with extensive knowledge of The Standards and the Recognition process.

A health department will be assigned a PHAB Accreditation Specialist during Recognition process steps where documentation is reviewed for conformity with The Standards. The Accreditation Specialist is a member of the Review Team. The Accreditation Specialist conducts an initial review of the applicant health department's documentation, and works to ensure quality assurance, consistency within and across reviews, rater and inter-rater reliability, and clarity of information in the Pathways Report. The Accreditation Specialist works closely with the Review Team and provides technical assistance concerning the review process and The Standards. The Accreditation Specialist acts as the point of contact between the Review Team and the health department.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on how to **contact PHAB staff**, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## C. PHAB Review Team

PHAB employs a peer review model. Reviewers must demonstrate their understanding of governmental public health services, as spelled out in PHAB's eligibility requirements. PHAB will identify Review Team members who have a background in and are experienced in military public health practice or experience working in a Military Installation Department of Public Health. After a reviewer application is accepted by PHAB, reviewers will undergo training designed to ensure consistency in assessments of The Standards (inter-rater reliability). To remain an active reviewer, individuals may be required to complete additional or refresher trainings as determined by PHAB.

Reviewers play a central, substantive, and critical role in the Recognition process. The Review Team, which is comprised of peer reviewer(s) and the PHAB Accreditation Specialist, reviews documentation submitted by health departments and writes the Pathways Report.

The Review Team represents PHAB. Their responsibility is to learn about the health department through the review and contribute to the development of the Pathways Report that accurately describes and reflects the health department that they have reviewed. The Review Team does not decide or recommend the Pathways Recognition status of the health department. The size of the Review Team is determined by the complexity of the review.

All communication between the health department and PHAB will be with the Accreditation Specialist, rather than with the volunteer Review Team member(s).

### Conflict of Interest

PHAB strives to ensure that a bias-free decision process is maintained. Anyone who will serve on a Review Team must identify and disclose actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest. Individuals will not be assigned to a Review Team for a health department with which a valid conflict of interest exists. The goal is to prevent any negative impact that conflicts of interest may cause to the Recognition process.

Conflicts of interest may include, but are not limited to—

- Previous or current employment with the health department;

- Previous or current consultation or other business arrangement with the health department;
- Family relationship with key employees of the health department; or
- Any other relationship with the health department that would afford the Review Team member access to information about the health department other than that which is provided through the PHAB Recognition process.

No reviewer may serve as a consultant to any health department they review for a period of 12 months following the conclusion of the site visit.

Reviewers sign an agreement form with PHAB that includes conflict of interest provisions inclusive of the above.

Additionally, to ensure objectivity, individuals that are currently working for a health department will not be assigned to serve on a Review Team for health departments within that same state.

The health department also has an opportunity to review potential Review Team members for conflict of interest and request that a change be made in their Team membership, based on that conflict.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For **guidance on eligibility** and how to **apply to be a reviewer**, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## VI. RECOGNITION PROCESS

The PHAB Pathways Recognition process consists of five steps: (1) Preparation, (2) Application, (3) Documentation Selection and Submission, (4) Review, and (5) Decision. Each of these steps includes tasks that have associated time limits. (See Appendix 1 for a process map outlining the steps in the process.) In extenuating circumstances, a health department may request an extension from PHAB for the step in which the department is at the time of the request. (See Appendix 2 for the policy for requesting an extension.) If PHAB approves the extension, the health department would be granted additional time to complete the tasks associated with that and following steps of the process.

Applicant health departments may choose to work toward an application for initial accreditation after receiving their Pathways Recognition decision or completing a single Pathways Recognition track.

### Step 1: Preparation

A health department's thorough preparation is critical to its success with the Recognition process. PHAB has developed resources to help health departments prepare for Recognition, including a series of courses and a required Readiness Assessment. Health departments will need an account in e-PHAB, PHAB's electronic system, to access some of these resources. Registering in e-PHAB is non-binding and does not commit a health department to submit an Application. At the time the account is registered, a health department may be asked to demonstrate that it is a governmental public health department eligible for Pathways Recognition.

### Pathways Education Resources

PHAB maintains information about its education resources on its website. The list indicates which courses the Accreditation Coordinator or the Health Department Director is required to complete before submitting an Application for Pathways Recognition. While many of these courses are on-demand, the Accreditation

Coordinator will be required to participate in at least one live-learning event (which may be held virtually or in-person) as part of their preparation.

## Readiness Assessment

The Readiness Assessment tool aids health departments interested in pursuing PHAB Pathways Recognition or accreditation in determining the best approach based on their current level of readiness. After the health department submits its assessment to PHAB, it will receive written feedback about its level of readiness for moving forward in either accreditation or Pathways. The decision about whether to move forward with Pathways, initial accreditation, or not at all based on this feedback is the decision of the health department. While completion of a Readiness Assessment is a required step in the process, the health department may decide to move forward as it sees appropriate.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on **preparing for Pathways Recognition**, including required trainings and the Readiness Assessment, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## Step 2: Application

After the health department has submitted its Readiness Assessment to PHAB and completed all required training, it will submit an Application in e-PHAB. The Application is formal notification to PHAB of a health department's official commitment to initiate the Pathways Recognition process. Applicants may choose to apply for either or both of the Pathways Recognition tracks. Tracks may be completed in any sequence or simultaneously. The Application, which includes agreeing to the Pathways Recognition Terms and Conditions, is a commitment that the applicant will abide by the current and future rules of PHAB's Pathways Recognition process to achieve Recognition. The Recognition process formally begins once a health department submits a completed Application.

If the Application is not submitted within 12 months of the health department completing its Readiness Assessment, the department may need to repeat some of the preparation steps, and there may be fee implications.\* The health department must coordinate directly with the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Manager to determine if and how such fees will be paid.

As part of the Application, the health department will be required to upload documentation that indicates support for Pathways from the appointing authority. The Application will also require additional information and documentation about the health department, such as its organizational chart. PHAB staff will review submitted Applications and required attachments to ensure that —

- The Readiness Assessment has been submitted, and the health department received feedback from PHAB;
- The Application is complete;
- Attachments that meet PHAB's requirements for the Application have been uploaded; and
- Necessary trainings have been completed.

PHAB will respond to the applicant, indicating whether the Application has been accepted as complete. If the Application is not accepted, the applicant will be advised of what additional or different information is required to complete the Application.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on the **Pathways Recognition application process**, including fees\*, visit [phaboard.org/resources](http://phaboard.org/resources).

*\* As of this document's publication, fees to apply for Pathways Recognition are centrally paid for by the DCPH-A/DHA for Military Installation Departments of Public Health at Army locations.*

## Step 3: Documentation Selection and Submission

**The documentation submitted by the health department to PHAB is critical.** It will be assessed by a PHAB Review Team to determine the health department's conformity with The Standards and to develop the Pathways Report.

After the health department's Application has been approved, the applicant health department will gain access to PHAB's Pathways course and be able to begin uploading documentation for each measure in e-PHAB. Health departments will be enrolled in a Pathways Learning Community cohort. While participation in PHAB's Pathways Learning Community is not required, health departments pursuing Pathways Recognition are encouraged to participate. The Pathways Learning Community is designed to support applicant health departments throughout the Pathways Recognition process by facilitating information sharing and peer learning. Pathways Learning Community cohorts are scheduled regularly throughout the year with enrollment dates posted to [PHAB's Pathways Recognition website](#). Additional cohort start dates and schedule changes based on applicant enrollment levels may be made by PHAB at PHAB's discretion. Regardless of whether a health department chooses to participate in the next upcoming Pathways Learning Community cohort, the health department must upload and submit their documentation to PHAB within 6 months of the cohort start date.

If a health department does not submit its documentation within the 6-month timeframe, the applicant must begin the process again with required training and Application and submit another fee\* payment. Associated fees are handled as part of the DoD contracting process managed by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team. If the applicant must begin the process again, requests must be approved by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team before being submitted to PHAB\*. Any associated costs may ultimately be the responsibility of the requesting health department.

The fees\* paid by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program cover costs associated with maintaining e-PHAB accounts, providing access to PHAB Accreditation Specialist support, and PHAB webinars and educational offerings. If you have questions about the fees\*, please contact the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team at: [dha.apg.pub-health-a.list.ph-improvement-accreditation@health.mil](mailto:dha.apg.pub-health-a.list.ph-improvement-accreditation@health.mil) and PHAB's Finance Office at [accounting@phaboard.org](mailto:accounting@phaboard.org) or 703.778.4549 Ext 200.

The Standards document includes the specific required documentation needed to demonstrate conformity with each measure. In addition, the "Requirements for All Documentation" section of The Standards document sets forth all requirements to which documentation must adhere. This includes the use of PHAB-provided Documentation Forms to accompany all submitted documentation. PHAB, in conjunction with the DCPH-A, has developed supplemental guidance to support Military Installation Departments of Public Health at Army locations in the interpretation of the requirements outlined in The Standards. The supplemental guidance provides additional guidance for use by Military Installation Departments of Public Health serving Army locations and Review Team members of examples reflective of programs, operations, services and functions within a military context with specific focus on those departments serving Army locations. The supplemental guidance does **not** replace the requirements outlined within The Standards, except where indicated in **bold red font** in the far left column.

**It is the responsibility of the health department to ensure that documentation is complete, speaks to the intent of the measure, addresses all elements required for the measure, complies with all aspects of the**

**“Requirements for All Documentation” section within The Standards, and directs the reviewers to the specific parts of the document that fulfill the requirements.**

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

For more information on **documentation selection**, including the Scope of Authority policy, Standards & Measures, and Documentation Forms, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).

## Step 4: Review

After the health department has submitted its documentation for all measures, review of the documentation begins.

The purpose of the documentation review is to assess the documentation against The Standards, considering the Pathways Recognition Supplemental Guidance for Military Installation Departments of Public Health, in order to develop The Pathways Report. The documentation review will result in an assessment of the health department’s conformity with each measure’s intent and requirements. Each measure will be assessed using one of four assessment categories:

**Fully Demonstrated:** In the professional judgment of the Review Team, the submitted documentation is complete, providing evidence of conformity with all elements of the Required Documentation set forth in The Standards.

**Largely Demonstrated:** In the professional judgment of the Review Team, the submitted documentation demonstrates the elements of the Required Documentation that are critical to the intent of the measure. That is, the health department is generally in conformity with the measure and meets its intent but is missing some elements or parts of the Required Documentation.

**Slightly Demonstrated:** In the professional judgment of the Review Team, the submitted documentation does not demonstrate the intent of the measure. While some documentation is in conformity with the requirements, the health department is missing vital elements of the Required Documentation. The pieces of the Required Documentation that are critical to the intent of the measure are not evidenced.

**Not Demonstrated:** In the professional judgment of the Review Team, the submitted documentation provides no evidence of conformity with the Required Documentation. None of the required elements are demonstrated.

## Initial Review

The PHAB Accreditation Specialist will conduct an initial review of all submitted documentation and will submit all measures initially assessed as Slightly Demonstrated or Not Demonstrated, as a batch, to the health department. Health departments will be provided the opportunity to upload additional documentation for those measures, with accompanying Documentation Forms. The additional documentation could have been created or revised after the health department’s original documentation submission date.

The health department will have 90 days to provide additional documentation for reopened measures. If the health department does not respond within the stated timeframe, the review will proceed with the originally submitted documentation. The purpose of the opportunity to request additional documentation during the review is to provide the Review Team with the information it needs to develop a Pathways Report that accurately describes how conformity with the measures was demonstrated and/or provides details of what is missing.

Measures initially assessed as Largely Demonstrated or Fully Demonstrated meet the “intent” of the requirement and typically will not be reopened for additional documentation. After PHAB receives the health department’s response to the initial review, if applicable, the Accreditation Specialist will review any additional documentation provided and update the initial assessment to develop the first draft of the Pathways Report.

## Secondary Review

The Review Team will review the draft Pathways Report, including measure assessments and conformity comments, as prepared by the Accreditation Specialist, as well as contextual information provided in the health department’s Application. The peer reviewers will also review the documentation for all measures scored as Slightly Demonstrated or Not Demonstrated and will review documentation for at least one measure in each Domain. The Review Team will reach consensus on the scoring of those measures assessed and Report comments.

As needed, the Review Team will hold a virtual documentation review meeting with the Military Installation Department of Public Health to view any documentation it could not submit electronically. The sole purpose of the documentation review meeting will be to view the documentation. Discussions pertaining to the quality or assessment of the documentation will not be held.

## Report

The Pathways Report is the Review Team’s comprehensive and final assessment of the health department’s conformity with The Standards, taking into account the Supplemental Guidance for Military Installation Departments of Public Health – Pathways Recognition, based on the entirety of the information gathered through the review process. The overall objective of the Pathways Report is to accurately describe the health department’s demonstration of conformity with the measures, the department’s strengths and opportunities for improvement, and how the health department functions.

The Review Team will develop a Pathways Report that is submitted to PHAB through e-PHAB. The health department may use the report for additional, continuous quality improvement, and to support planning and preparing for initial accreditation, if desired.

The Review Team provides an assessment and narrative for each measure. The narrative provides a summary of how conformity with the measure was demonstrated, and details any missing required element(s). The Review Team may also describe any areas of excellence and/or opportunities for improvement that it identifies. Even if a measure is Fully Demonstrated, the Team may note any identified opportunities for improvement. These opportunities for improvement are not considered in the Recognition decision.

An overall Pathways Report summary provides the Review Team’s appraisal of the health department’s (1) three greatest strengths, (2) three greatest opportunities for improvement, and (3) overall impressions of the department as a functioning health department.

The final Pathways Report is sent to the health department, for their information. Health departments do not have an opportunity to submit comments at this point in the process concerning the Pathways Report at this time. Rather, health departments may submit comments about the Pathways Report or any part of the Recognition process as part of PHAB’s evaluation processes.

PHAB does not make Pathways Reports available to anyone other than the health department, the DoD COR, the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team, and PHAB staff. The health department may share its Pathways Report with others, at its discretion.



## Step 5: Recognition Decision

### Recognition Decision Process

PHAB's President & CEO reviews the health department's Pathways Report and determines Recognition status based on how measures are scored. To receive Pathways Recognition, health departments must complete both Tracks, and all measures in both Tracks must be scored as either Fully Demonstrated or Largely Demonstrated.

PHAB does not accept testimony, letters, phone calls, or other means of communication from the public about an individual health department while its Recognition process is in progress.

### Recognition Status

**Recognition status will only be awarded to health departments that successfully demonstrate both tracks. The two recognition decisions that PHAB can make are Pathways Recognized and Pathways Not Recognized.** Recognition status is awarded at a point in time; health departments communicating their status must state the year. For example, "Well-being County Health Department, PHAB Pathways Recognized, 2023."

Through e-PHAB, PHAB will send a letter stating the official PHAB Pathways Recognition decision to the Health Department Director with a copy to the Accreditation Coordinator within 2 weeks of the decision. No verbal feedback is provided to applicants before the official, written decision letter is sent through e-PHAB to applicants.

Pathways-Recognized health departments receive a certificate, a plaque and access to online resources specifically for Pathways-Recognized health departments.

A decision to not recognize a health department would be based on non-conformity with The Standards or failure to complete the Recognition process within the allotted timeframe.

Through e-PHAB, PHAB will send a letter indicating an applicant's demonstration of a single Pathways Recognition track to those applicants who successfully complete (i.e., are assessed as Fully Demonstrated or Largely Demonstrated on all measures of the track) *either* the Partnerships and Services Track *or* the Health Department Systems Track. **To receive Pathways Recognition status, applicants must successfully demonstrate both tracks.** If health departments complete the tracks one at a time, documentation for the second track must be submitted within 2 years of receiving the PHAB letter indicating demonstration of the first track.

### Notification of Decision

PHAB will publish a list of Pathways-Recognized health departments on its website. Health departments receiving a decision of Not Recognized will not be listed. PHAB will also notify the Military Installation Department of Public Health, the assigned DoD COR, and the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team of all PHAB decisions.

## VII. Moving Toward Accreditation

The Pathways Recognition Program has been designed to allow health departments to use it as a method of preparation for initial accreditation. **To that end, PHAB will allow documentation assessments from Pathways Recognition to transfer to a health department's initial accreditation review if a health department applies for initial accreditation within 2 years of successfully completing one or both Pathways Recognition Tracks.**

- a. This guidance applies to measures assessed in track(s) completed within the 2-year

timeframe only. For example, if a health department demonstrates the Partnerships and Services Track in 2022, becomes Pathways-Recognized for demonstrating the Health Department Systems Track in 2023, and applies for initial accreditation in 2025, only the measure assessments for the Health Department Systems Track would transfer to initial accreditation because the Partnerships and Services Track assessments would have expired in 2024.

b. The timeframes are determined by the date upon which acknowledgement of successful track completion or Pathways Recognition is conferred.

## VIII. Appendices

# APPENDIX 1: PROGRAM PROCESS STEPS

### Pathways Recognition Steps

STEP 1: PREPARATION	Health Department learns about PHAB.	
	Health Department creates an account in PHAB's electronic systems.	
	Health Department reviews PHAB's education resources.	
	Health Department completes pre-applicant training and Readiness Assessment.	
	PHAB provides feedback on Readiness Assessment and health department decides to pursue Pathways (Track 1 - Services and Partnerships, Track 2 - Health Department Systems or both).	
STEP 2: APPLICATION	Health Department applies for Pathways Track 1 - Services and Partnerships, Track 2 - Health Department Systems, or both.	
STEP 3: DOCUMENTATION SELECTION & SUBMISSION	PHAB enrolls the Health Department to participate in the next Pathways Recognition Learning Community cohort.	
	Health Department chooses whether to participate in optional Pathways Learning Community cohort.	
	PHAB provides the Health Department with access to Pathways Recognition documentation submission in e-PHAB on the same date the cohort begins.	
	Health Department uploads and submits documentation to e-PHAB within 6 months of when the department gets documentation submission access in ePHAB and cohort start date.	
STEP 4: REVIEW	PHAB conducts initial review of documentation against Pathways Standards & Measures.	
	PHAB reopens measures with questions and submits those questions to the Health Department for response.	
	Health Department responds to reopened measures within 90 days of receiving access to reopened measures.	
	Review Team conducts secondary review of new/additional documentation provided by Health Department.	
STEP 5: REPORT	Review Team completes Pathways Report.	
<p><b>All measures Largely Demonstrated/Fully Demonstrated in Track 1 -Services and Partnerships or Track 2 - Health Department Systems?</b></p>		
<p><b>Both Tracks: All measures Largely Demonstrated/Fully Demonstrated?</b></p>		
Yes - Demonstration of Track Achieved	Yes - Pathways Recognized	No - Not Pathways Recognized

# APPENDIX 2: MILITARY INSTALLATION DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH EXTENSION POLICY

If a health department will miss any PHAB deadline and requires an extension, it must contact the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team to explore this as a possibility.

If an extension request is approved by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team, then the health department will need to submit a written request for an extension to their PHAB Accreditation Specialist.

If the health department is requesting an extension of **90 days or fewer**, it can be submitted via email. The Health Department Chief/Director must either be the one sending the email or be cc'd on the email.

If the extension is **greater than 90 days**, the health department will need to complete the Extension Application Form (posted on the PHAB website) and email it to their Accreditation Specialist. Extensions of more than 90 days will be granted for extenuating circumstances only. **If a health department applies for both tracks simultaneously, it can request extensions for a total of 6 months. If a health department applies sequentially, it can apply for a total of 6 months per track.**

For Pathways Recognition, the maximum extension is a total of 6 months per track. If a health department needs longer to complete its submission, then it may need to restart the Pathways Recognition process again at a later date. There are fee\* implications for doing so, and associated fees are handled as part of the DoD contracting process managed by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team. If the applicant must begin the process again, requests must be approved by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Manager before being submitted to PHAB\*. Any associated costs may ultimately be the responsibility of the requesting health department.

The fees\* paid by the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program cover costs associated with maintaining e-PHAB accounts, providing access to PHAB Accreditation Specialist support, and PHAB webinars and educational offerings. If you have questions about the fees\*, please contact the Defense Public Health Accreditation Program Management Team at: [dha.apg.pub-health-a.list.ph-improvement-accreditation@health.mil](mailto:dha.apg.pub-health-a.list.ph-improvement-accreditation@health.mil) and PHAB's Finance Office at [accounting@phaboard.org](mailto:accounting@phaboard.org) or 703.778.4549 Ext 200.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources)

To access the **extension request form**, visit [phaboard.org/resources](https://phaboard.org/resources).



Pathways Recognition  
Program for Military  
Installation  
Departments of Public  
Health

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