

## Excellence Recognition Program

Nearly 20 practitioners from federal, state, local and Tribal health agencies came together, virtually and in-person, on May 13, 2022 to participate in a PHAB Think Tank to inform the development of an Excellence Recognition Program for health departments. Development of such a program is in response to the PHAB 2018-2022 strategic plan priority that called upon PHAB to 'ensure programs and services meet a continuum of health department needs.

### **The purpose of the Think Tank was to:**

1. Inform PHAB's development of an Excellence Recognition Program for health departments
2. Consider motivations, incentives, challenges, concerns and opportunities of health departments in response to availability of an Excellence Recognition program for health departments.

PHAB provided an overview of existing PHAB program components that had relevance to the strategic priority. This included updates on the newly released Version 2022 of Initial Accreditation and Reaccreditation, the Pathways Recognition Program and the Vital Records/Health Statistics Accreditation program. Specifically, information was shared on the level at which PHAB accreditation standards are set (neither minimum, nor maximum), how a health department achieves accreditation (i.e., all measures need not be fully or largely demonstrated) and elements of the process.

Prior to the convening, PHAB shared findings from a scan of other accreditation programs that include excellence or distinction programs to consider whether and how their experiences might inform PHAB program development. For example, the scan explored programs that recognized topics areas and those that focused on overall excellence for an organization. In some cases, first time accreditation applicants were not eligible to apply for the additional distinction. There were programs for which the distinction was granted for those achieving accreditation multiple times whereas other programs required conformity with additional measures. Learnings from the scan were presented and discussed in a focused conversation as well as brought to bear throughout the remainder of the agenda.

Discussion throughout the Think Tank focused on the following topics:

- How an excellence program could provide value to health departments and the field
- How to define potential program goals
- How an excellence program would relate to the existing accreditation program (e.g., built into the process, separate from initial accreditation, how that works with current scoring)

- Whether an excellence program would be topic specific (e.g., excellence in data) or focus on the entire health department
- What is the potential market for such a program
- What are the risks associated with developing and implementing an excellence program for health departments

**There was emerging agreement on several principles:**

- Any program should have measurable criteria, and be flexible and allow for creativity and innovation. (Including community participation and feedback as part of the process was one potential way of allowing flexibility and ensuring health departments were being responsive to community needs.)
- It will be important to emphasize equity and building community trust (although more discussion is needed to determine whether to embed these concepts everywhere and/or to have related Areas of Excellence).
- The program should strive for inclusivity—making it accessible to all health departments—to avoid inadvertently widening the gap among health departments.
- The program ought not be overly complex.
- A phased approach to the program development makes sense, such as beginning with testing a pilot product in one or more areas of excellence/expertise.
- The program should be aimed at accredited health departments.
- Sharing learnings and providing mentoring from recognized health departments are important goals, although PHAB will need to be thoughtful about not overburdening recognized health departments with these expectations and activities, particularly if they are not compensated for their time.

There are a number of complexities associated with the development of Excellence Program for health departments. PHAB maintained detailed notes from the Think Tank, which will be used to process the discussions as next steps for program development are implemented.