

Policy for PHAB Pathways Recognition Program

**A Step Toward Performance
Improvement and Accreditation**



Adopted February 2022

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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 two years. Note that completion of the Pathways Recognition program on its own does not confer accreditation status on a health department.

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.

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 initial accreditation Version 2022. The Pathways Recognition process is intended to be flexible and inclusive to accommodate many different configurations of public health departments at local, Tribal and territorial levels.

Recognized health departments demonstrate accountability to their stakeholders. The program’s goal 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 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.

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 domain 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 assessments from Pathways to 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 below.

Additional Information

This document can be found on the PHAB website – www.phaboard.org. The sections entitled “For More Information” reference additional resources, including tip sheets, and online courses. Those resources may be updated as new information becomes available. Accreditation Coordinators (those serving as PHAB’s point of contact for the Pathways Recognition Program or the accreditation program) are encouraged to use those resources as they are preparing for Pathways Recognition.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

For more information about the Pathways Recognition program, including benefits, and more, visit phaboard.org/pathways

II. APPLICABILITY OF POLICY

PHAB will periodically revise this policy and The Standards. This 2022 version of the policy (the “2022 Policy”) was adopted by the PHAB Board on June 10, 2022. It is applicable to any health department applying under Version 2022 of the PHAB Pathways Recognition Program. The 2022 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 recognition process is applicable throughout the duration of the respective health department's cycle unless the health department and PHAB mutually agree that a different version will apply. If PHAB amends any provision in the 2022 Policy, it will take reasonable efforts to notify the point of contact for each health department registered in PHAB's electronic system 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, territory, or at the local level 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. PHAB will determine the applicant's eligibility to apply for public health department 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.

A. Local Health Department

A local health department is defined, for the purposes of PHAB Pathways Recognition, as the governmental body that is authorized to serve a jurisdiction or group of jurisdictions geographically smaller than a state and recognized as having the primary legal authority to promote and protect the public's health and prevent disease in humans. This authority is defined by the state's constitution, statute, or regulations or established by local ordinance or through formal local cooperative agreement, contract, or mutual aid agreement. The entity may be a local health department, local entity of a centralized state health department, city, city-county, county, district, or regional health department.

Cross-jurisdictional sharing among local health departments

PHAB understands that health departments often share services across jurisdictions. Documentation of services provided by another entity for an applicant's jurisdiction can be submitted. If multiple health departments formally agree to coordinate on both administrative functions and on a range of services, they are encouraged to discuss with PHAB the most efficient way of documenting conformity with The Standards for the entire jurisdiction. For example, if there is a formal entity that represents the collective work, it may be appropriate to consider that as the applicant.

B. Tribal Health Department

A Tribal health department is defined, for the purposes of PHAB Pathways Recognition, as a federally recognized Tribal government, Tribal organization,¹ or inter-Tribal consortium, as defined in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, as amended. Such departments have jurisdictional authority to provide public health services, as

¹ As evidenced by inclusion on the list of recognized Tribes mandated under 25 U.S.C. § 479a-1. Publication of List of Recognized Tribes

evidenced by constitution, resolution, ordinance, executive order or other legal means, intended to promote and protect the Tribe's overall health, wellness, and safety; prevent disease; and respond to issues and events.

Federally recognized Tribal governments may carry out the above public health functions in a cooperative manner through formal agreement, formal partnership, or formal collaboration.

C. Territorial Health Department

Territorial health department is defined, for the purposes of PHAB Pathways Recognition, as the entity with primary responsibility for public health in a territorial area; this may be referred to as the ministry of health or health department. For the purposes of PHAB accreditation, "territorial" refers to U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa) and other U.S. affiliates in the Pacific (the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands).

Umbrella Organizations

Health departments may apply for 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 recognize only the public health function of the umbrella organization.

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, upon which PHAB's scope of authority was developed. 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, regardless of whether they apply to the whole 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 organization wide), the scope of PHAB's 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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.

IV. OVERARCHING POLICIES

Terms and Conditions

A health department 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”). The Health Department Director will be required to 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 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 recognition, revocation of recognition status, or other appropriate disciplinary action.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

To read the Pathways Recognition **Terms and Conditions**, visit phaboard.org/resources.

Confidentiality

The health department applicant acknowledges and agrees that PHAB will undertake reasonable efforts to keep information exchanged throughout the 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 publish the list of recognized health departments, including basic information such as location, date of recognition, 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 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 PHAB recognition process.

At all times, health departments are solely responsible for abiding by all applicable state and federal laws regarding personal or sensitive information. For example, for requirements related to personnel, 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 PHAB's electronic system). PHAB cannot advise regarding a health department's particular obligations under applicable law. As such, health departments should seek counsel for complying with applicable privacy laws.

Fees

A PHAB Readiness and Training Fee will be required before health departments are able to submit a completed Application for Pathways Recognition.

The Pathways Recognition fee is due when the application for Pathways is approved by PHAB. Invoices are due within 30 days of receipt of invoice. The fee is required to be paid by the health department to proceed with application. The fee is not refundable.

A health department may wish to receive their invoice early (that is, before they submit their Application) in order to accommodate their financial management process. PHAB is willing to send an invoice to a health department early, upon the receipt of a written request from the health department. The written request may be an email to accounting@phaboard.org.

Additional fees may apply for optional training opportunities that are not outlined in this policy. All fees will be published on the PHAB website. The PHAB Board of Directors reviews the fees annually and publishes any revisions on the PHAB website.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

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

Evaluation

For PHAB's continuous quality improvement of the 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 the recognition experience. PHAB uses the findings of its evaluations to make decisions regarding all components of the 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. Nothing that a health department says will affect the recognition decision.

Technical Assistance

Health departments should direct all questions on the 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 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 recognition. PHAB will designate specific courses that are required during the Preparation step (see Recognition Process below).

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 with other applicants who apply during the same time period.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

For more information on **technical assistance**, including the PHAB Learning Center, visit phaboard.org/resources.

V. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Health Department

Health Department Director

The Health Department Director for PHAB Pathways Recognition purposes may either be the health department's top executive or medical director/health officer. The top executive is defined as the highest-ranking employee with administrative and managerial authority at the level of the health department. The medical director or health officer is defined as the highest-ranking clinician (e.g., physician, PA, NP, etc.) with oversight for the health department's protection programs.

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 PHAB Pathways Recognition are required to appoint one person as a point of contact for PHAB, termed the Accreditation Coordinator. The Coordinator may be the Health Department Director. However, PHAB recommends that when possible, it 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 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 Health Department Director. The appointing authority is responsible for providing a letter of support to apply for PHAB Pathways Recognition.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

For more information on **selecting an Accreditation Coordinator**, visit phaboard.org/resources.

B. Accreditation Specialist

PHAB Accreditation Specialists will be available to provide technical assistance concerning the 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 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 departments.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

For more information on how to **contact PHAB staff**, visit phaboard.org/resources.

C. 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. 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 recognition status of the health department.

All communication between the health department and PHAB will be with the Accreditation Specialist, rather than with the 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.

Before reviewers can be assigned their first health department, they will sign an agreement form with PHAB that includes conflict of interest provisions inclusive of the above. Reviewers will be asked to update that form periodically.

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

For guidance on eligibility and how to apply to be a site visitor, visit 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 the step of the process.

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

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 completed Readiness Assessment to PHAB, it will be reviewed by PHAB staff and written feedback about the department's level of readiness for moving forward in either Pathways and/or initial accreditation will be provided to the department. The decision about whether to move forward with Pathways, initial accreditation, or neither based on this feedback is the decision of the health department. While completion of the Readiness Assessment is a required step in the Preparation process, PHAB will not require health departments to pursue the recommended course of action. The health department may decide to move forward as it sees appropriate.

PHAB Readiness and Training Fee

While health departments can access many resources for free, PHAB requires a Readiness and Training Fee before health departments are able to either submit their Readiness Assessment or attend a live training. If the health department submits its Application (for accreditation or Pathways) within one year of paying that Readiness and Training Fee, a portion of the fee will be credited towards the one-time fee for PHAB's Pathways Recognition program or the annual accreditation fee.

FOR MORE INFORMATIONphaboard.org/resources

For more information on **preparing for Pathways**, including required trainings and the Readiness Assessment, visit 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 paying its PHAB Readiness and Training Fee, it may need to complete some of the Preparation steps again and submit another fee. Additional information is in the fee schedule.

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 the 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 told what additional or different information is required to complete the Application.

Upon acceptance of the Application by PHAB, the health department will receive an invoice for the Pathways Recognition fee. Payment of invoices is due to PHAB within thirty days of receipt of the invoice.

FOR MORE INFORMATIONphaboard.org/resources

For more information on the **Pathways application process**, including fee, visit phaboard.org/resources.

Step 3: Documentation Selection and Submission

The documentation submitted by the health department to PHAB is critical. It will be assessed by a 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 be able to begin uploading documentation for each measure in e-PHAB. Health departments must upload and submit their documentation to PHAB within 6 months of the date of gaining access to the Pathways course in e-PHAB. If a health department does not submit its documentation within the timeframe, the applicant must begin the process again with required training and Application and submit another fee.

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.

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.

State-wide Documentation: PHAB will work with states where the state health department is PHAB accredited¹ and interested in ways to streamline the recognition process for local health departments in their state. For example, if there are state-wide documents that would likely be submitted by local health departments, PHAB could review those documents once rather than have each local health department submit and have the document reviewed. PHAB is also willing to discuss opportunities for alignment with the state's reporting requirements for local health departments.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

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

Step 4: Review

After the health department has submitted its documentation for all measures, review of the documentation begins. However, PHAB will not begin the review if the health department has an unpaid invoice.

The purpose of the review of the documentation is to assess the documentation against The Standards and to develop The Pathways Report. The review of the documentation 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 conducts 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 an accompanying Documentation Form. 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 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 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 the health department's response to the initial review is received by PHAB, the Accreditation Specialist will review any additional documentation provided and update the initial assessment.

Secondary Review

The Review Team will review the draft Report, including 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 those assessments and Report comments.

Report

The Pathways Report is the Review Team's comprehensive and final assessment of the health department's conformity with The Standards, 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 what required element(s), if any, was missing. The Review Team may also describe any areas of strength and/ or describe any opportunities for improvement that are identified. Opportunities for improvement identified by the Review Team may be noted, even if the measure is Fully Demonstrated. These opportunities for improvement are not considered in the recognition decision.

An overall Pathways Report summary provides the 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. 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 and PHAB staff. The health department may share their Pathways Report with others, at their 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 recognition, health departments must complete both Tracks and **all** measures in both Tracks must be scored either Fully 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 their recognition process is in progress.

Recognition Status

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

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

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

PHAB will send, through e-PHAB, a letter indicating an applicants' demonstration of a track for those applicants who successfully complete (i.e., are assessed as Fully 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 tracks one at a time, documentation for the second track must be submitted within two years of the 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 health will not be listed.

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:

1. Offer a discount to the initial accreditation fee if a health department applies within 2 years of demonstrating one track or a larger discount if applying within 2 years of receiving Pathways Recognition. The discount will be published annually as part of the fee schedule, available on PHAB's website.
 - b. The timeframes are determined by the date upon which acknowledgement of successful demonstration of a track or Pathways Recognition is conferred.
3. 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 completing one or both Pathways Recognition tracks.
 - d. This applies to measures assessed in track(s) completed within the 2-year timeframe only. For example, if a health department demonstrates the Services and Partnerships track in 2022 and then becomes Pathways Recognized for demonstrating the Health Department Systems track in 2023, and then applies for initial accreditation in 2025, the assessments for Health Department Systems only would transfer to accreditation because Services and Partnerhsips assessments expired in 2024.
 - e. The timeframes are determined by the date upon which acknowledgement of track completion or Pathways Recognition is conferred.

APPENDIX 1: PROGRAM STEPS

Pathways Recognition Steps

1 Preparation	Health Department decides to pursue a PHAB product	
	Health Department registers in e-PHAB	
	Health Department pays Readiness and Training Fee and completes pre-applicant training and Readiness Assessment	
	PHAB provides feedback on Readiness Assessment and health department decides to pursue Pathways (Track 1, Track 2 or both)	
2 Application	Health Department applies for Pathways – Track 1, Track 2 or both	
3 Documentation Selection & Submission	PHAB provides Health Department access to documentation submission in e-PHAB and sends invoice to Health Department	
	Health Department pays invoice	
	Health Department uploads and submits documentation to e-PHAB	
4 Review	PHAB conducts initial review of documentation against Pathways Standards & Measures	
	Health Department responds to reopened measures	
	Review Team conducts secondary review of new/additional documentation	
5 Accreditation Decision	Review Team completes Pathways Report	
All measures Largely Demonstrated/ Fully Demonstrated in Track 1 or Track 2?		Both Tracks: All measures Largely Demonstrated/ Fully Demonstrated?
Yes – Demonstration of Track Achieved		Yes – Pathways Recognized
		No – Not Pathways Recognized

APPENDIX 2: EXTENSION POLICY

If a health department will miss any PHAB deadline, they need to submit a written request for an extension to their Accreditation Specialist (AS). If the health department is requesting an extension of 90 days or fewer, it can be submitted via email. The Health Department 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 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 six months. If a health department applies sequentially, it can apply for a total of six months per track.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

phaboard.org/resources

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

**Policy for Pathways
Recognition Program**



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