

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CORNER: April-May 2019

Welcome to the third installment of Quality Improvement Corner. Here, PHAB Accreditation Specialist April Harris, MPH, CHES, talks about building a strong culture of continuous quality improvement.

One significant benefit that is often overlooked when practicing continuous quality improvement is the opportunity to evaluate what went well and what challenges were encountered. This feedback is often achieved during the evaluation or “check” phase of a QI project. Whether it’s figuring out the most efficient way to gather feedback or discovering limitations with data collection, it’s likely that the QI project cycle will reveal insightful lessons learned. QI projects often result in measurable, data-driven outcomes that benefit a department, which is excellent! However, it’s also important to note the barriers the team or health department overcame during the project, so that future teams don’t run into the same issues. These revelations are lessons learned, not failures, and should be noted within the QI project documentation, so that other project teams can anticipate these issues and plan appropriately. Consider doing a de-brief or electronic survey with the QI project team immediately following the completion of a QI project to get honest, quick feedback.

For example, Williamson County and Cities Health District (TX) recently completed their fifth PDCA cycle for one of their QI projects related to a new electronic approval form. The health department explained, “This project proved to be much more complicated and difficult to implement than we had anticipated. Challenges included staff difficulty in interpreting the form (not understanding the linked fields, for instance), reluctance to embrace a new way of doing things, difficulty in balancing the need for greater detail with accessibility, effectively communicating through instructions and job aids, addressing all customer needs, and changes to other processes.” This is extremely insightful and valuable information for the health department to learn from as they work towards building a strong culture of continuous improvement! Ivah Sorber, Accreditation Coordinator, stated, “We continue to strive for a culture of quality improvement and do often have set backs no matter the level of knowledge of QI at WCCHD. It is extremely important to understand the word improvement and know that there is never an ending, but an opportunity for continued growth and learning.”

This type of reflection is built into the PHAB requirements, as well. For health departments seeking initial accreditation, reference Version 1.5 Standard and Measure 9.2.2, which includes language to support lessons learned, “how the health department reflected and acted on what they learned.”

During the planning phase of a QI project, try scanning current resources to see if other health departments have completed similar projects, to learn from their successes and discover what challenges they faced and how they overcame them. The Public Health Performance Improvement Network (www.phpin.org) is a great resource, as well as PHAB’s Accreditation Works stories.

As announced in previous communication, PHAB continues to work on the development of the new PHQIX site. We are excited for this transition and will keep you updated on the progress and may also ask for your feedback in the future! If you have any questions about the PHQIX transition, please reach out to April Harris, aharris@phaboard.org or Jessica Kronstadt, jkronstadt@phaboard.org.