

Standards and Measures Documentation: Tips for Success: January-February 2019

This is the third in a series of columns in which PHAB staff share tips for successfully demonstrating conformity with various PHAB Standards and Measures. Here, PHAB Chief Program Officer Robin Wilcox discusses Measure 7.1.1, the assessment of the availability of health services.

The last column in this series addressed the intent of Domain 7 to improve community systems to ensure that the population has access to needed health care services. That column focused on the identification of populations who lack access to care and the characteristics of the community that can decrease or increase access. In general, Domain 7 requires multi-sectoral collaboration, in-depth analysis of the populations who lack access, creative system-thinking, and community systems-level changes.

Some health departments have asked questions specifically about Required Documentation 3 of Measure 7.1.1, which addresses “emerging issues in public health, the health care system, and health care reimbursement” and requires consideration of how they impact access to care. Specifically, PHAB has been asked if an increase in a particular disease (e.g., zika, flu, antibiotic resistant TB) is considered to be an “emerging issue” for this Required Documentation. Emerging diseases are addressed in the measures that relate to surveillance in Domain 2 and data analysis in Domain 1. The focus of Domain 7 is the system of care and how people access it, not the health issues that are prevalent.

The increased incidence of a disease can certainly put a strain on the health care system and may also require extra public health efforts, such as increased flu immunization clinics, reconsideration of quarantine policies, or targeted health education. However, Required Documentation 3 of Measure 7.1.1 is requiring that the collaboration consider how the health system is changing. Some examples of emerging issues for health care might be an increase in the number of doctors who are joining concierge medical practices, an increased use of convenient care clinics by the population, or the closing of certain hospital services. Examples of emerging issues in public health could be the shift from direct services to community health development or planned changes in the community transportation system. Changes in reimbursement structures, rates, or payment mechanisms can create or exacerbate access issues. These systems-level emerging issues must be considered in any effort to develop strategies to reduce barriers to health care (Measure 7.2.1, Required Documentation 2). Emerging public health, the health care system, and health care reimbursement issues can be challenges and/or opportunities and must be factored into efforts to increase access to care. Therefore, the incidence or prevalence of a particular disease is not an appropriate example to meet the intent of Required Documentation 3 of Measure 7.1.1