

Standards and Measures Documentation: Tips for Success

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of columns in which PHAB staff share tips for successfully demonstrating conformity with various PHAB Standards and Measures. In this inaugural installment, PHAB Chief Program Officer Robin Wilcox discusses measures related to cultural competence and cultural barriers.



A number of measures in the PHAB Standards and Measures address cultural competence and cultural barriers among the population: i.e., cultural competence of the health department's messages for Measure 3.1.1; cultural sensitivity and linguistically appropriate information in Measure 3.2.6; efforts to address cultural and language barriers to care in Measure 7.2.3; and the provision of socially, culturally and linguistically appropriate policies, processes, programs, and interventions in Measure 11.1.4.

On the surface, some populations may seem to be homogeneous, and the health department may feel challenged to demonstrate conformity with these measures. However, when multiple aspects of the community are considered, communities are never homogeneous. PHAB recommends thinking "diversity" instead of thinking "homogeneous versus heterogeneous." Diversity goes beyond race and language to include age (for example, teens and the elderly), educational attainment, income levels, disability, and faith. It can include the geography of neighborhoods, roles in the community, sexual and gender orientation, income levels, levels of social capital, and literacy and health literacy.

The more the community appears to be homogeneous, the more challenges the health department may face in reaching out, establishing trust, and developing lines of communication with those that have different social, family, or religious customs or have other barriers to health equity and to the receipt of public health services. There are always opportunities to reach out to diverse groups of individuals in the community. Interacting with diverse groups of individuals is a central responsibility of public health in its work to produce health in communities.

If health departments dig a little deeper into their communities, they will find that not everyone is the same. For PHAB measures that address barriers, inequity, and cultural sensitivity and competence, the health department should describe the group(s) that they are reaching out to, partnering with, and addressing with public health efforts.