

Celebrating 10 Years of PHAB Accreditation

Three Rivers District Health Department

Staff size: 44

Population served: 45,600

The PHAB Standards & Measures provided a “roadmap” for Three Rivers District Health Department (TRDHD) to do sound public health work. Without question, collaboration proved to be the most important skill gained during the accreditation process. Collaborative efforts to improve health are essential. Working together, sharing resources, and combining talents enhance the opportunities and likelihood for achieving positive health outcomes.



Accreditation helped jumpstart public health transformation in the state.

TRDHD was instrumental in collecting state-wide data and conducting analysis which was the foundation for [public health transformation in Kentucky](#). Since 2014, TRDHD has been a leader among those involved including the Kentucky Health Directors Association, with support from the Kentucky Public Health Association, local boards of health, the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, the Kentucky Office of Rural Health, and the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services Department for Public Health.

The initial purpose for public health transformation was to establish a framework for local health departments to regain financial stability; however, the urgency to radically overhaul Kentucky's public health system stems from the necessity to improve the overall health of its citizens which consistently rank among the poorest in the country. The state's public health transformation goals are to:

- Ensure equitable access to public health services across Kentucky;
- Increase focus on population health;
- Promote fiscal responsibility;
- Strengthen collaboration and partnerships, and
- Optimize internal capacity.

TRDHD collaborated with state policymakers to draft legislation which became House Bill 129 and resulted in public health transformation becoming state law in 2020. This led to statutory amendments that categorized public health programs (KRS 211.185), emphasized local needs assessments (KRS 211.187), and established a new funding formula for local health departments (KRS 211.186).

Kentucky recognized the need to continue efforts toward public health transformation, despite COVID-19 priorities. In 2021, Three Rivers became part of a transformation project team to manage the statewide planning initiative promote key initiatives:

- Public health transformation laws.
- Plan review, including the strategic plan.
- Program inventory and budget review.
- Organizational infrastructure and data management.

For TRDHD, health equity is integral to public health transformation, communication is fundamental to maintain transparency at all levels, and public health transformation supports a culture of change wherein everyone is encouraged to explore new ways to offer services to improve health outcomes and access.

Success: Quality Improvement

Staff understanding the cyclical nature of systems thinking, quality improvement and the need for performance management have played a part in many agency-wide and departmental improvements.

Advice: Document, Document, Document!

Much of the work that accreditation requires is work that local health departments are already doing, they just aren't documenting it. We all know, if we didn't write it down, it didn't happen. When you get something – a process, procedure, or practice – down on paper, it aids in accountability.

Promising Practice: Zombies to drive quality improvement.

In July 2013 at an all-day staff meeting, TRDHD presented a quality improvement tool in a unique way – as zombies! Dressed in ripped clothes, fake blood and make-up, the QI team capitalized on the popularity of zombies in pop culture at the time and worked through the QI tool by creating criteria and weighted scores to determine what tool a human would need to ward off a zombie. Hypothetical weapons considered were shotguns, crossbows, pistols, and machetes. The staff narrowed down the options by scoring criteria achieving consensus on the best weapon.

The goal was for staff to experience the utility of a new quality improvement tool as well as the prioritization matrix, and the team identified three objectives:

1. introduce the prioritization tool that can be utilized in public health practice,
2. empower staff to be able to independently utilize the prioritization matrix in their respective quality improvement projects, and
3. maintain and foster a continuous quality improvement culture.

TRDHD provides technical assistance to several Kentucky local health departments by training staff on quality improvement. The zombie apocalypse training was replicated with two additional health departments to teach the prioritization matrix and was well received. As a result, TRDHD was received a NACCHO Model Practice Award.