

Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services – Long Beach, California

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Interview conducted via telephone on December 13, 2007, 12pm

Long Beach has 409 public health workers and serves about 480,000 people.

The health department has been using the Core Competencies in a variety of ways since 2002. The most notable way is through their public health emergency management program which enhances public health infrastructure and prepares the department for responding to outbreaks and man-made and natural disasters. Additionally, the department is incorporating the Core Competencies in their Public Health Competency Education and Training Academy, which is currently under development. The Academy provides specific training under each domain of the Core Competencies for a broad range of public health disciplines (e.g., doctors, nurses, administrators, health educators, epidemiologist, and front line staff) and other first responders (e.g., police, fire, disaster management personnel). They are also divided by skill level, so that those in leadership positions learn different skills than those in more clerical positions. Other sets of competencies, in particular nursing competencies, are integrated into the Academy. Many of the courses are oriented (especially for higher level staff) toward things that are not learned in school, such as financial management, budgeting, grant writing, etc.

The health department also mentioned that the Core Competencies help them in educating the public as to what they do. By providing a specific framework and set of skills that are standard to public health professionals, it is easier to lay everything out, both for the public, and for city leadership, the mayor and city council.

The Core Competencies also help the department set goals and judge what success would look like in Long Beach in a certain number of years. Additionally, the Core Competencies were essential to the Department's success in getting a bioterrorism cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Public health may have the potential to be focused into specific areas. Some staff may not be aware of the broader vision outside of their specific programmatic area. The Core Competencies have helped the Department educate all staff to have at least a basic understanding of what other staff does and how their roles fit into the more global public health picture to meet the mission of the department. This, in turn, has helped staff at all levels feel involved and approach challenges as a team. Examples of this include department wide required training and exercises.

The Department had two major suggestions for updating the Core Competencies. First, they would like more competencies based on informatics. They would like language that reflects how public health works with other government agencies and alleviates the

burden on the health system. With so much technology now available, it is important that public health professionals understand how to exchange/share information and how to provide information for real time decisions.

The other suggestion was to integrate emergency preparedness into the Core Competencies.

Overall, the Department said they found the Core Competencies most useful for leadership positions, as well as nursing and epidemiology specialties. The Core Competencies are less useful for lower level staff, such as medical assistants. The importance of these types of employees is often overlooked. They are generally the first people that citizens see and have the most direct face time with patients. They are the face of any health department and often have the language base to communicate most effectively with the community.