



National Public Health Services Research Forum  
American Public Health Association  
Atlanta, Georgia - Oct. 23, 2001  
*Draft Proceedings*

## **Background**

The concept for a Public Health Services Research Forum emerged from the growing desire of those in the public health arena to embrace stronger relationships between the academic and practice communities to build the evidence-base in public health practice and improve public health infrastructure. To this end, public health supporters, researchers, practitioners, and communities, must work together to maximize system efficiency, build credibility, strengthen effective advocacy and system building and improve the effectiveness of applied research. As a result, the first national meeting of the Forum was held during the Annual meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) on October 23, 2001.

## **Purpose**

The purposes of the APHA session were to: 1) briefly address the current state of public health services research; 2) discuss developments in the field of public health services research; 3) recap the public health services research meeting at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), May 9 –10; 4) gain insight into funding organization perspectives relative to current public health services research initiatives; and 5) recap action items and next steps.

More specifically, the session provided the necessary Forum in which supporters, users, and producers of public health services research could:

- 1) inform one another about the current state of public health services research;
- 2) assess the state of current research activities;
- 3) learn from major organizations supporting public health services research about their organizations' current initiatives and future plans in relation to public health services research; and
- 4) discuss different perspectives on research priorities.

From this first ever convening of a National Public Health Services Research Forum it was hoped that some consensus could be generated around the following ideas:

- 1) developing a national research agenda that will help to identify and prioritize research needs;

- 2) establishing an on-going research forum where public health services researchers can come together and share methods, findings, and questions;
- 3) piloting 3 to 4 "Centers of Excellence" in public health services research; and
- 4) creating a public health services research fellowship program to help "grow" the pool of researchers in this field.

## **Panelists Presentations**

The Forum provided panelists from organizations in support of bolstering public health services research the opportunity to share and discuss their organizations' current initiatives and future plans in relation to this type of research. The following summaries represent the essence of those presentations.

**Dr. Lawrence Greene** – Office of Extramural Prevention Research, Public Health Practice Program Office (PHPPO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

The Office of Extramural Prevention Research (OEPR) focuses on increasing the visibility and funding for CDC's extramural prevention research, and supporting research projects that address cross-cutting issues of prevention and health promotion, in order to supplement the specific disease and injury emphases of other CDC funding mechanisms. In FY 2002, the OEPR through the CDC Extramural Prevention Research Program (EPRP) will invite applications for 25-35 new investigator-initiated prevention research grants for research that is jointly conducted by partnerships of investigators in academic or other non-profit institutions and practitioners in state and local public health agencies. On average, the awards will total between \$450,000-500,000 each. Dr. Greene also commented that new grant applications will need to be explicit about the involvement of practice/community agencies and organizations.

**Dr. Maureen Lichtveld** – Public Health Practice Program Office (PHPPO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Dr. Lichtveld suggested that public health leaders need to strengthen the involvement of academia in practice activities and address the barriers that currently limit these activities. Central to this effort, she emphasized that academia must be willing to learn what the practice questions should be and provide evidence-based answers to those questions. Dr. Lichtveld also identified several public health services research needs including: 1) quantifying public health's efforts toward improving the nation's health status; 2) conducting prevention research; and 3) the determination and translation of what comprises a competent public health workforce.

**Dr. Doug Lloyd** - Center of Public Health, Bureau of Health Professions (BHP), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)

Dr. Lloyd reported that HRSA has been very successful in enumerating the public health workforce through the design, development, and analysis of state workforce profiles. Building upon this work, HRSA plans to reduce disparities and increase the number of

providers in underserved populations. To that end, researchers must look beyond the supply of healthcare providers and examine the implications financial, geographic, and behavioral barriers to care. This can be accomplished, in part, by improving public health services research and analysis to drive political action.

**Ms. Eileen Salinsky** - Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)

Ms. Salinsky reported that as a result of recent events, policy advisors to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the American public have unprecedented levels of awareness about the need to improve public health infrastructure. She emphasized the need for public health leaders to respond quickly to this “window of opportunity” by strengthening the relationship between researchers and policy makers to ensure public health programs and interventions receive adequate levels of funding. Furthermore, the field of public health should develop more “translators,” or those who could clearly and effectively, synthesize research findings and report them to policymakers in a meaningful way, i.e. work with the Office of Management and Budget and provide technical assistance to staffers on Capitol Hill. She also identified several other areas that need improvement including: 1) surveillance capacity; 2) information management tools; 3) organizational models; and 4) development of minimum public health agency standards.

**Dr. Geri Tolson** – GlaxoSmithKline (GSK)

Dr. Tolson described GSK’s new AIDS Drug Assistance Program in relation to the need to improve public health services research. GSK began conducting public health services research to provide physicians and decision-makers with evidence based information about healthcare delivery, clinical effectiveness, and health outcomes. She further commented that research of this type could strengthen the link between clinical medicine and healthcare delivery that is necessary to improve effectiveness and outcomes. This linkage also provides a conduit for the dissemination of information and resources that, at present, has no natural forum.

**Dr. Bobbie Berkowitz** - Turning Point Initiative

Dr. Berkowitz indicated that the Turning Point Initiative, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is developing partnerships to strengthen public health infrastructure through a collaborative model. There were a number of challenges to public health agencies and systems that prompted the investment in this initiative including: 1) inadequate information and technology systems; 2) financial instability; 3) integration of public/private systems; 4) inadequate leadership and workforce development; 5) management of systems; and 6) performance management. Initially, it was hypothesized that public health infrastructure was required for healthy outcomes, however there was and continues to be no clear evidence to support this relationship. Therefore, the impetus to improve public health’s capacity to conduct public health services research on this and other issues has become paramount.

Dr. Berkowitz also noted that through the development of national collaboratives around issues such as public health performance standards, leadership, information technology, public health law modernization, and social marketing, useful and feasible models to change the policy climate have been developed.

## **Needs for Advancing Public Health Services Research**

The following statements represent a comprehensive list of research and funding needs identified by Forum participants to advance public health services research.

- Identify public health's current capacity and/or willingness to:
  - Fund and conduct public health services research.
  - “Quantify” public health's efforts toward improving the nation's health status.
  - Conduct research on prevention effectiveness.
  
- Identify the research questions that need to be answered.
- Articulate what performance standards are and what they should be.
- Identify ways to increase the involvement of academe in the development and implementation of a national public health services research agenda including the recognition of barriers that exist.
- Assess current levels of funding for public health activities and identify the relationship between those funding levels and health outcomes.
  
- Identify current and future capacities of the public health workforce.
  - Determine and translate what comprises a competent workforce.
  - Evaluate current workforce training capacity.
  - Identify the workforce capacity needed at the local level.
  - Determine if an investment in agency planning capacity at the state and local levels will improve the system to improve health outcomes.
  - Identify mechanisms to attain and sustain a well-skilled competent public health workforce.
  - Evaluate the impact of an incentive system for public health professionals on workforce development.
  
- Evaluate the impact of workforce development and training on health outcomes.
  - Determine if robust public health infrastructure is required for healthy outcomes.
  - Identify the determinants that effect community health outcomes.
  - Determine the effect, if any, that strengthening the skill levels and competence of public health leaders has on improving performance and health outcomes.
  - Evaluate the ability of current public health leaders' skills and competence to improve health outcomes.
  
- Identify the role information technology will play in public health research now and in the future.

- Determine the likelihood that an improvement in information technology will lead to an improved public health response.
  - Identify ways to integrate information technology into practice and clinical laboratories.
- Determine if community-based solutions to community-based problems result in healthier communities.
  - Determine the likelihood that investment in health policy, as an intervention, will lead to health improvement.

## **Recommendations**

The Forum also provided participants from academic and practice communities the opportunity to share and discuss recommendations for advancing public health services research. The following sections, categorized into groups based on the session agenda, represent summary recommendations made by Forum participants. These recommendations do not necessarily reflect group consensus.

### **Public Health Services Research Agenda**

- Develop a national research agenda and prioritize research needs.
- Strengthen public health's capacity to conduct public health services research and analysis in order to drive political action and achieve objectives set forth by Health People 2010.
- Utilize public health services research to gain a better understanding of the ties between teaching and learning and how they translate into practice and research, specifically how outputs relate to outcomes.
- Incorporate the CDC's seven Core Capacities for preparedness into the public health services research agenda framework.
- Define the research questions that make sense based on national priorities and objectives such as CDC's seven Core Capacities or the Healthy People 2010 plan.

### **Research Funding**

- Strengthen relationships between researchers and policy makers because a "window of opportunity" exists to ensure adequate funding of public health programs and interventions as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.
- Find a primary funding source for public health services research.

### **Development of On-Going For a**

- Establish a leadership collaborative where public health research supporters can come together to ensure that adequate funding is available for public health services research.

- Organize a special session at a nationally recognized meeting to discuss public health practice issues and research, e.g. American Public Health Association or Academy for Health Services Research and Health Policy.
- Establish an on-going research Forum where public health services researchers can come together to share methods, findings, and questions.
- Establish credibility and trust between the practice and academic communities to work side by side in developing a national public health services research agenda.

### **Centers of Excellence/Fellowships**

- Pilot 3 to 4 "Centers of Excellence" in public health services research in order to develop and translate research into action.
- Develop more "translators," or those who can clearly and effectively, synthesize research findings and report them to policymakers in a meaningful way.
- Utilize public health services research to strengthen the link between clinical medicine and healthcare delivery that is necessary to improve effectiveness and outcomes.
- Strengthen the relationship between health systems and public health services research.
- Develop incentive strategies for tenure track faculty in Schools of Public Health to engage in practice activities.
- Increase the visibility and credibility of public health practice publications/articles so that they are more widely recognized.
- Strengthen relationships between those in the academic and practice communities.
- Conduct research with the community, not on the community.
- Improve upon the quantity and quality of infrastructure and workforce data sets.
- Address major research gaps between the infrastructure of state and local governments and state and local health departments by looking at public health systems in context.
- Develop public health services research fellowships for students and faculty to help "grow" the pool of researchers in this field.
- Improve upon the quantity and quality of infrastructure and workforce data sets.
- Address major research gaps between the infrastructure of state and local governments and state and local health departments by looking at public health systems in context.

### **Consensus Areas**

Based on recommendations set forth during the APHA session, the Forum confirmed the need to:

- 1) develop a national research agenda and prioritize research needs;
- 2) establish an on-going research Forum where public health services researchers can come together to share methods, findings, and questions;
- 3) pilot 3 to 4 "Centers of Excellence" in public health services research in order to develop and translate research into action;

- 4) create a public health services research fellowship program to help "grow" the pool of researchers in this field; and
- 5) establish a leadership collaborative where public health research supporters can come together to ensure that adequate funding is available for public health services research.

### **Next Steps/Outcomes**

- Develop an action/implementation plan for the creation of 3-4 Centers of Excellence and doctoral-level public health services research fellowships.
- Establish a leadership collaborative where public health research supporters can come together to ensure that adequate funding is available for public health services research.
- Develop a working relationship with Research!America to promote prevention research and public health services research as a national priority.
- Organize a special session at a nationally recognized meeting to discuss public health practice issues and research, e.g. American Public Health Association or Academy for Health Services Research and Health Policy.
- Publish a series of articles discussing the need for public health services research.
- Integrate the CDC's 7 Core Capacities in the framework for developing a public health services research agenda and research priorities.