Assessing the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of Public Health Professionals in Big City Governmental Health Departments

Background
Big Cities Health Coalition (BCHC) members, like most governmental public health agencies, struggle to hire a workforce with the skills and knowledge that are most applicable to the positions in local health departments (LHDs) for which they are recruiting. In 2011, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH), a founding member of the BCHC, conducted a survey of hiring managers to understand their assessment of how well prepared Master of Public Health (MPH) graduates were for their LHD-based positions. The consensus among the hiring managers was that many MPH graduates begin their careers “incompletely prepared” in many of the foundational capabilities of public health including communications, policy development, leadership, and financial management.

Overview
Building upon the work of the NYC DOHMH, and in partnership with the de Beaumont Foundation, the BCHC will field a similar survey membership-wide to assess the preparation of professional-level staff for local governmental public health practice. In addition to the survey, BCHC staff will conduct key informant interviews in BCHC member cities whose jurisdictions have at least one graduate school or program in public health, and hold an in-person convening with key stakeholders.

The project aims are to:

1. Identify and prioritize the skills needed among professional masters-level non-supervisory staff working in large, urban health departments;
2. Characterize gaps in knowledge, skills, and abilities of these professionals to perform programmatic work (i.e., “practice” public health) in large, urban health departments; and
3. Catalogue recommendations to address these gaps.

Methods
BCHC has convened an advisory committee of subject matter experts in public health practice and workforce research and training. Under the guidance of this advisory group, BCHC staff will:
1. Administer a survey to hiring managers in at least 25 of the 28 BCHC member health departments;
2. Interview staff from approximately 10 BCHC member health departments, in which there is a school or program of public health in the same city, and interview an academician (i.e., practice dean) from said school or program; and
3. Convene experts to discuss findings from the data gathering and solutions to the challenges raised.

Advisory Committee Members
- Jim Buehler, MD, Professor, Dornsife SPH, Drexel
- Brian Castrucci, MA, Chief Program and Strategy Officer, de Beaumont Foundation
- Theresa Chapple, PhD, MPH, Senior Research and Evaluation Officer, de Beaumont Foundation
- Ashley Edmiston, MPH, Director, Workforce Development, NACCHO
- Abdul El-Sayed, MD, Executive Director of Public Health and Health Officer, City of Detroit
- Jeff Gunzenhauser, MD, MPH, Interim Health Officer and Medical Director, LA County Health Department
- Shelley Hearne, DrPH, Senior Advisor, Big Cities Health Coalition
- Calaine Hemans-Henry, MPH, Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Public Health Training, NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- Rita M. Kellihier, Senior Director, Education and Practice, Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health
- Laura Rasar King, MPH, MCHES, Executive Director, Council on Education for Public Health
- Carolyn Leep, MS, MPH, Senior Director, Research and Evaluation, NACCHO
- Jennifer McKeever, Director, Public Health Practice and Training, NNPHI
- Kathy Miner, PhD, Associate Dean, Applied Public Health, Rollins SPH
- Melissa B. Moore, MSW, MBA, Behavioral and Public Health Branch Chief, Division of Nursing and Public Health, Bureau of Health Workforce, HRSA
- Katie Sellers, DrPH, Chief Science and Strategy Officer, ASTHO
- Craig Thomas, PhD, Director, Division of PH Performance Improvement, OSTLTS, CDC

Results and Dissemination
BCHC will synthesize the quantitative and qualitative data, as well as findings from the in-person meeting. Results will be disseminated to BCHC members and the public health community through release of the report and/or other complementary publications, webinars, and presentations at relevant meetings.