Epidemiology, Planning and Communication

Tri-County Health Department

2017 Annual Report • Published June 2018
Epidemiology, Planning and Communication

The Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) Epidemiology, Planning and Communication (EPC) Division conducts a diverse array of activities linked by a common focus on impacting population health in the TCHD jurisdiction. In 2017, the EPC Division employed approximately 30 FTE, all housed at the Administration Office in Greenwood Village. Division activities are funded by a mix of grant funds and general funds, with some positions funded by both.

Some EPC Division staff work in areas that are foundational to the work happening across all divisions and programs at TCHD.

- The Informatics, Epidemiology and Health Planning team analyzes data to understand the distribution and determinants of health and disease in the TCHD jurisdiction that helps guide decision making and prioritization in TCHD’s efforts to improve population health.

- EPC staff are also leading the implementation of an agency-wide Performance Management plan and Quality Improvement process.

- Strategic communication activities across the agency is of growing importance and includes strategic communication planning; media relations; public information; social media; oversight of the TCHD website; marketing for TCHD programs and services; and design and production of the TCHD Annual Report and other marketing materials.

- EPC Division staff also led the agency-wide effort to gain National Public Health Accreditation.

Other teams within the EPC Division work in areas focused more on specific population health issues such as tobacco prevention; substance abuse prevention; injury prevention; and mental health promotion. While the content of the work differs by health issue, the nature of the work and the strategies employed are very similar across topic areas. Staff work on policy change, partnership development, systems change, and environmental change to accomplish their overarching prevention goals.

Similar to last year, EPC is sharing highlights of its work from 2017 within the framework of the TCHD Strategic Plan goal areas. This report, while far from comprehensive, should provide an overview of the exciting work happening on behalf of TCHD.
Goal 1: Informatics and Technology Capacity

Make data easily accessible to staff and the public
Due to the efforts of the Informatics, Epidemiology and Health Planning (IEHP) team, TCHD program staff and partners are increasingly using data to monitor and prioritize health issues, set targets, evaluate change, identify emerging issues and understand the root causes of health conditions. The IEHP team makes data products and services available to support this work including the annual County Health Fact Sheets, opioid and mental health story maps, TCHD boundary maps, evaluation plans and analyses on various health topics.

Collaborate with external organizations to share data resources
Through collaboration with partners, regional local public health staff use this new access to data to identify, monitor, and understand health needs and conditions in the Metro Denver region. Various analytic projects have been undertaken including work on Hepatitis C prevalence, teens with two births, and African American Infant Mortality.

Create a public health informatics infrastructure
A cross divisional Informatics Governance Group (IGG) exists to ensure TCHD informatics solutions are technically stable, cost-sustainable, and prioritized to the department’s needs. In 2017, the structure and operations of the IGG were established, staff satisfaction with informatics capacity was surveyed, and a policy was established for acquiring and utilizing information management tools and systems. The IGG will oversee a needs assessment in 2018 to identify gaps in capacity and inefficiencies in structure in order to modernize information management at TCHD to support Public Health 3.0.
Goal 2: Strategic Communication

Building bridges to growing communication
In 2017, communications focused on building relationships with our city and county communicators to be more effective providing important health information to our residents. This is also helping the health department reach more participants for our diabetes classes and other health initiatives.

In 2017:
Website visits grew to 235,417 (from 94,719 in 2014)
Twitter followers grew to 1,891 followers (from 660 in 2014)
Facebook grew to 635 page likes (from 367 in 2016)

Internal Communication
In 2017, TCHD completed seven employee focus groups, in conjunction with an employee survey, to determine how to improve internal communications. The results indicated that a majority of employees are satisfied with the quality and quantity of communication they receive internally. Many great ideas for enhancing internal communications were generated from the process that will be implemented in 2018 including an intranet site.

Regional campaigns
TCHD was able to put out several critical health communications to residents by improving communication collaboration with key partners in Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas counties. TCHD communications:
- Worked with partners to communicate on testing homes for radon, getting flu vaccinations, and rabies prevention, as well as several other messages about Hepatitis A and C.
- Coordinated with local public health partners to increase HPV vaccination rates among 11 to 12 year old children, reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, and reduce mental health stigma.
- Partnered with the city of Aurora’s Office of International and Immigrant Affairs to kick off the Health Powers Life campaign to improve the health of immigrants and refugees living in the city. The website healthpowerslife.org received more than 3,083 page views and 884 visits.

In TCHD’s jurisdiction, the Healthy Beverage Partnership Facebook posts were potentially seen in English 138,300 times and in Spanish 121,002 times. During the Denver metro area campaign, 4,597 people visited hiddensugar.org and 642 people took the Healthy Drink Pledge to serve healthy beverages for 30 days. The HPV campaign was seen or heard more than a hundred million times in the Denver metro area with 328,679 website visits to hpvfreeco.org.

2016 Annual Report
The theme of the 2016 TCHD Annual Report was The Determinants of Health. Social, behavioral, environmental and health care factors can make a real difference in an individual’s opportunity to achieve optimal health. These opportunities can vary dramatically for different groups of people, creating health inequities between different populations and communities. The annual report illustrates how the work that TCHD does to address the determinants of health can help reduce these inequities. The Annual Report designed by Gary Sky won the Colorado Healthcare Communicators Bronze Leaf Award, the sixth time our Annual Report has received a national or regional communicators award.
Goal 3: Policy and Partnerships

In 2017, EPC Division staff did a great deal of work involving policy change and partnerships. Several of these efforts are highlighted under Goals 5, 6, 7, and 9 below. In addition, EPC staff are involved in a number of “internal partnerships” collaborating with staff from other divisions. They collaborate around a common topic such as health equity, school health, and local government partnerships.

In discussions about health equity and vulnerable populations, older adults are often overlooked. It is important to remember that older adults, particularly those with limited resources, are one of the most vulnerable populations – and a rapidly growing one as well. EPC staff coordinate efforts across divisions and in TCHD communities with a focus on including older people in health promotion and policy work.

A Matter of Balance: Managing Concerns about Falls
TCHD is the regional coordinator for the evidence-based A Matter of Balance (MOB) fall prevention program for adults age 60 or over in the metro-Denver region. The implementation model includes establishment of partnerships with external agencies to provide outreach and deliver MOB classes in new community settings each year. With progressive increases over the past 10 years in deaths due to falls among older adults, fall prevention is of increasing importance. The MOB program is thriving with the strong strategic partnerships TCHD has developed, supporting TCHD in delivering 16 community-based MOB classes to approximately 200 older adults each year, reaching out to rural Arapahoe County, and supporting expansion into additional underserved communities across all three TCHD counties in 2017.
Goal 4: Organizational Sustainability

Public Health Accreditation
Achieving national Public Health Accreditation is a strategy under Goal 4 of the TCHD Strategic Plan. EPC staff led the agency-wide effort to achieve national Public Health Accreditation, which is a national approach to documenting quality of the core services provided by public health departments. Administered by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), this rigorous process covers 12 domains of essential public health activity.

TCHD achieved five-year national public health accreditation status on November 14, 2017! Led by EPC’s Accreditation Manager, Jana Smith, Ph.D., many TCHD staff from across the agency, worked tirelessly in 2017 to complete the extensive process of preparing documentation to meet requirements and accomplish this important milestone for the agency.

In September 2017, staff also met with the PHAB team during a two-day site visit to discuss and demonstrate TCHD’s program measurements. In its final report documenting TCHD’s performance against standards, PHAB assessed 98 of the 100 required measures as fully or largely demonstrated—a stellar report! Moving forward, EPC will lead TCHD’s efforts to maintain PHAB standards in all of its work in a process of continuing quality improvement and demonstrating progress in annual reports to PHAB.

Performance Management/Quality Improvement
As part of the Accreditation process, EPC staff led the development of an agency-wide Performance Management/Quality Improvement Plan that details both a structure and a process for implementing a Performance Management System at TCHD. This includes a process for identifying and implementing Quality Improvement projects across the agency, led by EPC’s Performance Management Coordinator and involving staff from every division, office, and program across TCHD.
Goal 6: Tobacco and Substance Abuse Prevention

Using a Shared Risk and Protective Factors Approach to Foster Healthy Youth

TCHD has multiple grants from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health focused on primary prevention of youth use and misuse of substances including alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and prescription drugs. This is done by working in partnership with communities, ensuring grant funds are invested locally, and using a shared risk and protective factors approach to implement evidence-based strategies. These strategies are known to prevent use of multiple substances and even have other health and social outcomes, such as preventing violence, teen pregnancy, and problem behaviors. Protective factors – such as mentorship, community connectedness, and trusted adults – are proven to increase the probability of healthy behaviors and success in young people. The Prevention Team’s goals are to increase protective factors and decrease risk factors in all communities. Collaborations in the communities include schools, youth-serving organizations, faith-based communities, chambers of commerce, government agencies, law enforcement, libraries, parents and youth, and others with the same goals of thriving youth in healthy communities.

Youth Coalitions and Leadership Boards
TCHD has worked with our communities to support six youth coalitions and leadership boards across all three of our counties. These young people have participated in community education about substances and their dangers, promoted protective factors in the community, and advocated for sustainable policy changes in their communities. With TCHD’s support, youth participants learn about the dangers of substance use and risk and protective factors. They also develop leadership skills and an understanding of the civic process.

Media Campaigns
TCHD conducted two paid media campaigns in 2017. Tobacco-Free 303 is a campaign developed by TCHD-sponsored youth coalitions with a positive message encouraging tobacco-free youth and tobacco-free communities. Speak Now Colorado is a statewide campaign which TCHD ran in targeted areas of Douglas County, encouraging parents to speak with their youth about substances, a known protective factor.

Smoke-Free Homes
TCHD has partnered with our Public Housing Authorities in implementing smoke-free policies for their multi-family properties. In 2017, Adams County Housing Authority (ACHA) became the newest housing authority to adopt a smoke-free policy in one building. TCHD will continue to support ACHA in expanding its policy portfolio-wide over the next few years. With TCHD’s support, ACHA also hired and trained a cessation navigator, providing coaching and support to residents wishing to quit. The State Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership recognized this model as a promising practice.

Tri-County Overdose Prevention Partnership
TCHD facilitates the community-based Tri-County Overdose Prevention Partnership, a community-based partnership of public and private partners across Adams, Arapahoe, and Douglas Counties. TCOPP’s goals are two-fold: 1) to reduce overdose deaths in the three counties and 2) to increase education and awareness of factors leading to and preventing death. In 2017, TCOPP partners worked to increase access to safe disposal options within the community, held one continuing education event for physicians and other healthcare providers about safe prescribing practices, conducted an environmental scan and needs assessment of further educational needs among providers, and conducted public awareness events including International Overdose Awareness Day.
**Goal 7: Interactions with Health Care System**

**Hospital Community Health Improvement Plan Collaboration**

In 2017, EPC staff continued to collaborate with not-for-profit hospitals in TCHD’s jurisdiction with the implementation of their community health improvement plans that are required by the Internal Revenue Service.

**Mental Health**

The TCHD hospital partners came together with the community’s health priority to promote mental health. As a result of this alignment, the hospitals made a financial investment for paid media for the Let’s Talk Colorado campaign.
**Goal 9: Mental Health**

**SIM Grant**
In August 2017, the partnership began the second year of a three year grant from the State Innovation Model (SIM) focusing on mental health. Led by EPC staff, the partnership is collaborating with four other local public health agencies in the metro-Denver area – Boulder County Public Health, Broomfield Health and Human Services, Denver Public Health, and Jefferson County Public Health. The work is focused in two areas:

1. Reduce stigma of mental health issues and increase openness to mental health care help-seeking attitudes and behaviors in low-income populations through a targeted messaging campaign.
2. Increase access to screening, referral, and treatment for mental health issues for low-income populations by increasing integration of mental health care and primary care.

**“Let’s Talk” mental health stigma-reduction campaign**
TCHD worked with partners to develop a messaging campaign urging everyone to talk openly about mental health and to talk with people who are impacted by mental illness.

The “Let’s Talk Colorado” campaign, launched in May 2017, includes a website that presents ideas on how to talk about mental health, a toolkit of resources including a video, a presentation on how to have a conversation, fliers and a newsletter article. The campaign stresses that talking about mental health and a person’s mental health struggles can “save a life,” so it’s worth dealing with some awkwardness or embarrassment at not knowing what to say. The effort also emphasizes that treatment for mental health issues does help in most instances, so persons with mental health symptoms, should be urged to see a physician or therapist.

The campaign was developed on a relatively small budget, with most of the funds going toward development and materials production. A large grassroots effort resulted in 41,357,628 impressions across partnerships. In 2017, paid media from hospital partners expanded the reach of this campaign (see Goal 7).
Mental Health and Primary Care Providers Integration

In 2017, TCHD implemented a plan, working in partnership with mental health and primary care providers, to address the gaps in mental health/primary care integration identified through previous key informant interviews. Some of the system-related issues from the interviews that the plan addresses include a need for:

- A streamlined intake process
- Higher levels of integration between mental health and primary care
- Reduction of barriers to sharing protected health information between mental health and primary care for treatment purposes
- Better alternatives to treating individuals in crisis in the hospital emergency department
- Better “loop closure” – getting a report back to primary care providers who have referred patients to mental health services, just as they do with referrals to other medical specialties

Internal Workgroups:

Substance Abuse Workgroup

Because the growing public health concern of substance misuse is a complex issue requiring attention from multiple sectors, all Divisions within TCHD address this issue in some way. The internal Substance Abuse Workgroup was formed to increase communication and collaboration and to reduce duplication of efforts across the agency. This workgroup includes representatives from EPC, EPR, Environmental Health, Nursing, and Nutrition. The work group collaboratively develops the annual work plan for Goal 6 of the Strategic Plan, discusses data publications and their implications on our work, and shares out programmatic updates in order to ensure alignment of all efforts across Divisions.
The majority of EPC funding supports staff salaries and benefits.

The Epidemiology, Planning and Communication Division is funded through a variety of revenue sources. The largest category is a series of state-funded sources that include the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (tobacco prevention, youth substance abuse prevention, mental health promotion/prevention), Colorado Department of Human Services Office of Behavioral Health (youth substance abuse prevention), and Denver Regional Council of Governments (older adult falls prevention). The rest of EPC's funding comes from both county per capita funding and non-county general funds, which support foundational services related to data analysis, strategic communication, public health accreditation, and division administration.