



Council on Linkages: Comments on Healthy People 2010 Draft Objectives

The mission of the Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice is "to improve public health practice and education by refining and implementing recommendations of the Public Health Faculty/Agency Forum, establishing links between academia and the agencies of the public health community, and creating a process for continuing public health education throughout one's career." It is comprised of leaders from national organizations representing state and local health departments, academic institutions, federal agencies, and managed care.

The Council on Linkages strongly supports the Healthy People 2010 document as a vital tool for establishing and improving the relationships between academia and public health practice. For nearly 20 years, national health objectives have served as important guides to public health planning, policy-making, and practice. All of the chapters in the Healthy People 2010 draft document are necessary and important. Linking academic research and practice is an important means for building workforce skills and will help to develop strategies for achieving all Healthy People 2010 objectives. These linkages are also important for building data capacity for all of the developmental objectives.

The Council on Linkages particularly supports the infrastructure and capacity-building objectives included in the draft Infrastructure Chapter. In fact, the Council recommends that the Infrastructure Chapter be moved to become Chapter 1 of the document since infrastructure drives the ability for health departments and communities to achieve all of the goals and objectives listed in other chapters. Building and improving the public health infrastructure is an area of crucial importance to bridging the gap between academia and practice. Specifically, developing a competent professional public health workforce requires up-to-date knowledge and skills to deliver quality essential public health services.

With regard to Objective 1 of the Infrastructure Chapter, the Council supports incorporation of competencies into personnel systems, as well as the development of agreed upon competencies for use by education and training programs. Training and retraining in the public and private voluntary sectors are needed to prepare the workforce for new challenges and responsibilities. Consensus needs to be built around defining what are the crosscutting competencies and how to integrate these skills and understandings into public health education and practice.

Similarly, the Council supports Objective 2. The Council believes that building the essential public health services into academic training in public health is another way to help link academe and practice. The academic base for public health is extremely broad and includes a wide variety of academic entities. By increasing awareness and knowledge of what public health agencies are expected to provide, newly emerging professionals in the range of public health disciplines will be better equipped to meet the challenges they will face once they enter the public health workforce. . A potential mechanism to consider in the effort to improve the linkage between public health practice and its academic base is the "academic health agency." Along with meeting the needs of communities for access to expertise and research opportunities, academic health agencies would be a particularly helpful mechanism for better preparing health professions students to meet the needs of communities.

In addition, the Council supports Objective 3 in order to ensure that training is provided to the workforce, in particular, to improve performance. Competencies are also related to performance standards and establishing baseline competencies is critical to meeting performance standards. The needs of public health agencies will not be met simply by hiring new public health professionals but by substantial and ongoing retraining and application of skills in new contexts. Along with designating a certain percentage of employees for continuing education and training, development of partnerships and collaborations with academia will provide efficient use of available resources and access to effective and efficient training modules.