Competencies for Population Health Professionals
March 20, 2019

The Competencies for Population Health Professionals (Population Health Competencies) are a set of skills desirable for population health professionals. Based on the Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals (Core Competencies), the Population Health Competencies are primarily designed for hospital, health system, public health, healthcare, and other professionals engaged in assessment of population health needs and development, delivery, and improvement of population health programs, services, and practices. This may include activities related to community health needs assessments, community health improvement plans, implementation of community-based interventions, and coalition building.

The Population Health Competencies describe areas of skills and knowledge beneficial to population health professionals. These competencies do not describe specific tasks or activities performed by population health professionals, as those are determined by places of employment. As the field of population health encompasses a number of distinct jobs or positions within a variety of types of organizations, individual competencies within the Population Health Competencies may be more or less relevant for individual population health professionals based on their specific job responsibilities. Individual population health professionals are encouraged to focus on developing competencies in the areas most relevant to their jobs.

Use of the Population Health Competencies

The Population Health Competencies align with the Core Competencies, a set of foundational skills for public health professionals, and can help strengthen the connection between public health and healthcare. The Population Health Competencies can be used to guide population health workforce development efforts, including the creation of training, workforce development and training plans, academic curricula, job descriptions, performance objectives, tools, and other resources to support the activities and growth of population health professionals.

Development of the Population Health Competencies

Development of the Population Health Competencies was shaped by input from numerous population health professionals and organizations. Development of this competency set began in early 2015 during a session at the Association for Community Health Improvement (ACHI) National Conference in which participants identified competencies within the Core Competencies most relevant to hospital needs related to population health. Drafts of the Population Health Competencies were refined based on feedback from ACHI and Catholic Health Association members, Council on Linkages Between Academia and Public Health Practice member organizations and members of the Core Competencies Workgroup, the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials' Center for Population Health Strategies, and others within the population health community, as well as a review of community benefit, population health, and competencies resources.

Organization of the Population Health Competencies

To facilitate use, the Population Health Competencies are organized into six domains:

- Community Engagement
- Community Health Assessment
- Community Health Improvement Planning and Action
- Health Equity and Cultural Awareness
- Systems Thinking
- Organizational Planning and Management

Feedback on the Population Health Competencies

The Public Health Foundation thanks the population health community for its contributions to the Population Health Competencies and welcomes feedback about the Population Health Competencies. Examples illustrating how population health professionals and organizations are using the Population Health Competencies and tools that facilitate Population Health Competencies use are also appreciated. Feedback, suggestions, examples of use, and resources can be shared by emailing competencies@phf.org.

For More Information

Additional information about the Population Health Competencies can be found at phf.org/PopulationHealthCompetencies. Questions or requests for information may be sent to competencies@phf.org.

Competencies for Population Health Professionals

Community Engagement
- Describes the historical and current conditions that are affecting health in a community (e.g., racism, historical trauma, power dynamics, natural disasters, poverty, housing)
- Identifies relationships that are affecting health in a community (e.g., relationships among hospitals, health departments, community health centers, primary care providers, schools, community-based organizations, and other types of organizations)
- Identifies factors influencing relationships (e.g., power dynamics, trust, local politics, competition) that are affecting health in a community
- Establishes relationships to improve health in a community (e.g., with organizations serving the same population, academic institutions, policy makers, customers/clients, and others)
- Maintains relationships that improve health in a community
- Creates opportunities for individuals and organizations to collaborate to improve health in a community (e.g., coalition building, facilitating collaboration)
- Collaborates with organizations for maximizing use of community assets and resources (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, public libraries, hospitals, businesses, faith-based organizations, academic institutions, federal grants, fellowship programs)
- Participates in partnerships to improve health in a community
- Gathers information in collaboration with community members for assessing community health needs and developing, implementing, evaluating, and improving policies, programs, and services
- Uses information in collaboration with community members for assessing community health needs and developing, implementing, evaluating, and improving policies, programs, and services
- Communicates with the public and professionals (e.g., translating complex topics, using social media, storytelling, active listening, engaging in discussion)

Community Health Assessment
- Describes factors affecting the health of a community (e.g., inequity, income, education, environment, demographic trends, legislation)
- Determines quantitative and qualitative data and information (e.g., vital statistics, electronic health records, transportation patterns, unemployment rates, community input, health equity impact assessments) needed for assessing the health of a community
- Applies ethical principles in accessing, collecting, analyzing, using, maintaining, and disseminating data and information
- Collects valid and reliable quantitative and qualitative data
- Analyzes quantitative and qualitative data (e.g., stratifying data to identify inequities, conducting content analysis of qualitative data to identify themes)
- Interprets quantitative and qualitative data
- Uses informatics and information technology in accessing, collecting, analyzing, using, maintaining, and disseminating data and information

- Assesses community health status and factors influencing health in a community (e.g., access to affordable housing; public and private sector policies; quality, availability, accessibility, and use of health services)
- Develops community health assessments using information about health status, factors influencing health, and assets and resources

Community Health Improvement Planning and Action
- Determines community health improvement priorities based on community health assessments
- Assesses quality of available evidence (e.g., literature, best practices, model/promising/emerging practices, local expertise and experiences)
- Makes evidence-informed decisions for policies, programs, and services (e.g., using recommendations from The Guide to Community Preventive Services in planning population health services, adapting evidence for local context)
- Develops community health improvement strategies (e.g., using evidence-based interventions, addressing identified health disparities and inequities, identifying potential resources) based on community health assessments
- Implements community health improvement strategies (e.g., reporting on progress, collaborating with community members)
- Evaluates the impact of community health improvement efforts (e.g., coalitions, policies, programs, services, previous activities)
- Implements strategies for continuous quality improvement
- Contributes to the population health evidence base (e.g., community-based participatory research, authoring articles, making data available to researchers and the public, adapting existing practices)
- Develops partnerships that will increase use of evidence in developing, implementing, and improving population health policies, programs, and services (e.g., between healthcare, public health, businesses, and community-based organizations)
- Advocates for the use of evidence in decision making that affects the health of a community (e.g., helping decision makers understand community health needs, demonstrating the impact of programs)
- Advocates for resources that improve health in a community (e.g., using evidence to demonstrate the need for a program, communicating the impact of a service, addressing social determinants of health)
- Influences policies, programs, and services external to the organization that affect the health of the community (e.g., zoning, safe housing, food access, transportation routes)

Health Equity and Cultural Awareness
- Incorporates ethical standards of practice into all interactions with individuals, organizations, and communities
- Communicates in writing and orally with linguistic and cultural proficiency (e.g., using age-appropriate materials, incorporating images, considering health literacy level)

- Recognizes the ways the diversity of individuals and populations (e.g., culture, language, health status, literacy) influences policies, programs, services, and the health of a community
- Supports diverse perspectives in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies, programs, and services that affect the health of a community
- Ensures the diversity of individuals and populations is addressed in policies, programs, and services that affect the health of a community

Systems Thinking
- Collaborates with individuals and organizations in developing a vision for a healthy community (e.g., emphasis on health equity and prevention)
- Describes the interrelationships of factors affecting the health of a community (e.g., inequity, income, education, environment, demographic trends, legislation)
- Describes healthcare and public health as part of a larger inter-related system of organizations that influence the health of populations at local, national, and global levels
- Explains ways organizations (e.g., hospitals, health departments, schools, businesses, libraries, faith-based organizations) can work together or individually to impact the health of a community
- Explains healthcare and public health funding mechanisms and procedures (e.g., third-party reimbursement, value-based purchasing, categorical grants, fees, taxes, budget approval process)
- Explains ways community development is funded to improve the health of populations at the local level (e.g., community development financial institutions, community development corporations, chambers of commerce, charitable organizations)
- Analyzes internal and external facilitators and barriers that may affect implementation of population health policies, programs, and services (e.g., organizational structure, leadership buy-in, resistance to change, trust of community)
- Describes the impact the organization is having on the health of the community
- Collaborates with individuals and organizations in implementing a vision for a healthy community

Organizational Planning and Management
- Describes laws, regulations, guidelines, and policies related to the organization's community health improvement activities (e.g., community benefit, community health needs assessment, community health improvement plan)
- Explains the structure, functions, financing, and governance of the organization
- Engages internal stakeholders (e.g., administrators, clinicians, financial officers) in the organization's community health improvement activities
- Contributes to development of organizational strategic plan (e.g., incorporates community health improvement plan, contains measurable objectives and targets)
- Justifies programs for inclusion in organizational budgets
- Develops program budgets
- Defends program budgets

- Manages programs within current and projected budgets and staffing levels (e.g., sustaining a program when funding and staff are cut, recruiting and retaining staff, engaging volunteers)
- Secures resources for programs to improve the health of a community (e.g., writing grant proposals, working with community development financial institutions, identifying existing community assets)
- Uses financial analysis methods in making decisions about policies, programs, and services (e.g., cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, cost-utility analysis, return on investment)
- Modifies population health policies, programs, and services in response to changes in the internal and external environment