

Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT PROCESS



Understanding the CHA Process

Overview

- A community health assessment (CHA) is a collaborative process that includes regular and systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of information on community health status.
- Common elements of a CHA include:
 - Develop a plan
 - Engage the community
 - Define the population
 - Identify community health indicators
 - Collect data
 - Analyze data
 - Identify health priorities
 - Report the results
- A Tribal CHA is beneficial to the tribal community, as well as its individual members, leaders, and health professionals because it can be used to assist in priority setting and health improvement planning.
- Public health departments, including tribal health departments, can voluntarily participate in a national accreditation program.
- PHAB determines and outlines the requirements of accreditation. A CHA is one of the three prerequisites of the PHAB Tribal Public Health Accreditation, and the focus of this toolkit.

COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT (CHA) DEFINITION

There are many definitions for a CHA. Most definitions describe it as a collaborative process that includes regular and systematic collection, analysis and dissemination of information on community health status to inform priority setting and health improvement planning. It is instrumental to public health practice, because it provides a snapshot of health status that can be monitored over a period of time, identifies the factors that affect the health of a community, and the information can be used for community mobilization and addressing health issues of concern.

Potential Use and Potential Benefits

A CHA is beneficial to the tribal community because the process encourages involvement of the community and key stakeholders in the identification of health issues. A CHA can build upon what is already known about community health status and improve individuals' understanding of community health issues. The results can be used to inform critical decisions made by tribal leaders and key health professionals about health programs and policies. Specifically, a CHA can be used in:

- Health services planning
- Health program development
- Resource allocation
- Describing services available in the community
- Verifying community health concerns
- Identifying and prioritizing health issues
- Monitoring trends on significant health issues over a period of time

Understanding the CHA Process

Potential Risk to Communities and Individuals

Collecting health data within a tribal community carries certain risks to both individuals and communities. Therefore, it is critical to involve tribal councils, health committees and/or the community at-large in the CHA process to ensure neither individuals nor the community is harmed. Tribes have an inherent right to protect and ensure the safety of their citizenry, and this includes the manner in which data are collected, stored, analyzed, and reported. Many tribes have formal and informal protocols for obtaining the appropriate approvals to collect data within their community. Respect for such tribal protocols and policies ensure that high ethical safeguards are maintained.

There are several approaches for conducting a CHA. All comprehensive CHAs involve a multi-step process that begin with planning and end with using the findings to address priority health issues. There are eight elements commonly followed elements in a CHA including develop a plan, engage the community, define the population, identify community health indicators, collect data, analyze data, identify health priorities, and report the results. See Figure 1.

COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Before reading the step-by-step guidance, it is helpful to become familiar with the overall framework of a CHA. Although the function of each of the eight common elements is quite different, the activities may overlap or occur simultaneously. This section provides a brief overview of the common CHA elements previously identified. See Figure 1.⁶

Figure 1: Common Elements of a CHA.



Understanding the CHA Process

Develop a Plan

One of the first steps of completing a CHA is completing a planning process. Developing a plan is more than mapping out a tentative timeline of major CHA activities. While all common elements of a CHA are necessary, this step is critical because it establishes the foundation for the entire CHA process. Most CHA plans include the following aspects:

- Gather leadership support
- Define the purpose, goals, and objectives
- Identify local resources and assets
- Establish a planning team with clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Develop initial work plans and timelines

Planning activities are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3 of this toolkit.

Engage the Community

Collaboration and community engagement are essential elements to conducting a CHA. Community-wide participation fosters greater collaboration and coordination of services to address community needs, engages partners in both the identification of and solution to important community health concerns, and builds community capacity to improve health outcomes. Consider the Tribal Public Health System, which includes all organizations, stakeholders, and partners responsible for assuring the health of a community. Each Tribal Public Health System is different in terms of the partners, their role, and level of engagement. Refer to Figure 2 for common entities involved in a Tribal Public Health System. For tribes, the CHA should not only be collaborative, but tribally-driven. Tribal leaders, health professionals, and community members are concerned about particular health conditions, and the availability of resources and services to address them. Collaboration and community engagement are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3 of this toolkit.

Figure 2: Tribal Public Health System



Define the Population

This step provides focus to the assessment process. Health departments often have jurisdiction over a geographic area and serve the population residing within the boundaries. Other than a shared locality, groups conducting a community needs assessment may use specific characteristics to define the population such as shared experiences, common interests, and race or ethnicity. The population definition will influence the remaining steps of the CHA including data collection, analysis, and reporting of data. Guidance for defining the CHA population is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3 of this toolkit.

Understanding the CHA Process

Identify Community Health Indicators

In a CHA, a health indicator is a measurement that reflects health of persons in a community or a group. Because entities conduct CHA for varying reasons, there is no prescriptive list of health indicators that must be covered in a CHA. Health indicators are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4 of this toolkit. Most CHA include health indicators related to the following topics:

- Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics
- Disease-specific health status (e.g., illness and death)
- Environmental (e.g., physical and built environment)
- Health behaviors
- Health resource availability

Collect Data

Guided by the CHA purpose and selected health indicators, individuals collecting data for CHAs first identify existing sources of available, data accessibility or ease of use, and quality data from a variety of sources. If data are not available then data are collected specifically for the CHA. Various types of data should be collected including primary, secondary, quantitative, and qualitative. These types of data and the data collection process are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this toolkit.

Analyze Data

Data analysis is the process of organizing data and applying statistical techniques to display information in a meaningful way for interpretation and making conclusions. Data analysis ranges from basic calculations of counts, averages, and percentages to advanced methods and statistical tests. Skilled professionals use computerized statistical software to manage datasets and perform data analysis. When data analysis is complete, the findings are compiled into a written report. For a CHA, this report is often called a Community Health Profile (CHP). Resources for data analysis and construction of the CHP are presented in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this toolkit.

Identify Health Priorities

Using the health issues identified in the CHA, health priorities are established. If the community had priorities before the CHA, the original priorities should be re-assessed given the new information. This activity should include input from leaders, persons involved in the CHA, and the community. Input should include opinions on which issues should be considered priority, and what will be done to improve the community's health. More information of re-assessing the priorities and using the findings are presented in greater detail in Chapters 4-5 of this toolkit.

Understanding the CHA Process

Report the Results

The CHA process does not end with the construction of the community health profile (CHP) report. The findings will not be valuable unless they are shared and made accessible to decision makers, health professionals, and community members. The presentation of the findings must be clear, accurate, and disseminated in a format that is appropriate for the target audience. Possible approaches for dissemination of reports include sharing findings at meetings, highlighting the key results in a newsletter, short report, or an oral presentation at community forums. Additional guidance for reporting the findings of a CHA are provided in greater depth in Chapter 5 of this toolkit.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

What is the difference between a community health assessment (CHA) and a community health profile (CHP)?

The CHA is considered the process, steps, and related activities that occur in order to plan, organize, implement, and successfully complete an assessment of the Tribal community's health. This assessment will produce a great deal of health information which needs to be organized in order to view and understand the information in a meaningful way. A CHP is a document that is used to compile the information obtained from a CHA. Therefore, the CHP is an outcome of a CHA. The CHP is the tangible product that provides documentation of the CHA.

The CHP is a report that summarizes the data and statistics that provide a "snapshot" of a community's overall health status and well-being at a given point in time. This snapshot can serve as a baseline to measure change and improvements in health status over time. The CHP is an excellent tool for engaging Tribal Councils, community members, partners and collaborators, and others in making informed decisions about how to effectively and collaboratively address health priorities.

Understanding the CHA Process

HOW IS A CHA RELATED TO PUBLIC HEALTH ACCREDITATION?

A CHA is one of three prerequisites for voluntary public health accreditation through the PHAB (Website: <http://www.phaboard.org/about-phab/>). Accreditation has been identified as a key strategy for strengthening public health infrastructure. The goal of accreditation is to improve and protect the health of every community by advancing the quality and performance of tribal, state, local and territorial public health departments. Public health accreditation was developed on the premises that, regardless of how a health department is structured or governed or where they live, everyone should reasonably expect the health department to meet certain standards.⁵ Public health accreditation provides a set of public health standards by which a tribe can systematically strengthen its self-determination and raise the level and quality of services it provides to the community. Public health departments can voluntarily participate in a national accreditation program.

Figure 3: CHA definition

According to PHAB, a CHA is defined as:

“A collaborative process of collecting and analyzing data and information for use in educating and mobilizing communities, developing priorities, garnering resources, and planning actions to improve the population’s health. The development of a population health assessment involves the systematic collection and analysis of data and information to provide the health department and the population it serves with a sound basis for decision-making and action.”

In addition to being a prerequisite, the CHA is one of the standards of PHAB accreditation. According to PHAB, a standard is the “*required level of achievement that a health department is expected to meet.*” The health department must demonstrate conformity to each standard by providing the required documentation of each measure. This toolkit focuses solely on the CHA, which relates to Standard 1.1 and its measures. Guidance from the PHAB is available in the PHAB Standards and Measure Document Version 1.0.

Accreditation is one method that a tribal health department can utilize to demonstrate commitment to the continued improvement of community health and public health practice. Although there is limited evidence, it is reasonable to expect that accreditation can have a positive impact on the health department, such as improvements in the delivery of services and operations.⁷

Only the tribe and/or persons authorized to make decisions about the tribal health department determines whether to conduct a CHA with intention to apply for accreditation through PHAB. Tribal health departments are highly encouraged to consider the purpose, potential benefits, eligibility, available resources, intention to maintain accreditation status, and unintended consequences of accreditation. These topics are considered below.

Understanding the CHA Process

Accreditation purpose: Accreditation uses standards and performance measures to ensure public health operations, quality improvement, workforce education and training, leadership development, and community engagement. Reasons that tribal health departments may seek accreditation are listed below.⁸

- To improve the quality of practice and performance within public health departments.
- To demonstrate the capacity of the public health department to deliver the three core functions and the ten essential services of public health.
- To identify performance opportunities for improvement, develop leadership, and strengthen relationships with community members.

Other benefits include:

- Strengthening self-determination by providing a framework for Tribes to improve public health infrastructure and build capacity.
- Identifying and acting on improvement opportunities in order to deliver high quality public health services to all community members.

Value to the tribal health department: The *PHAB Guide to National Public Health Department Accreditation* identified the following as benefits of public health accreditation:⁹

- High performance and quality improvement
- Recognition, validation, and accountability
- Improved communication and collaboration
- Potential increased access to resources

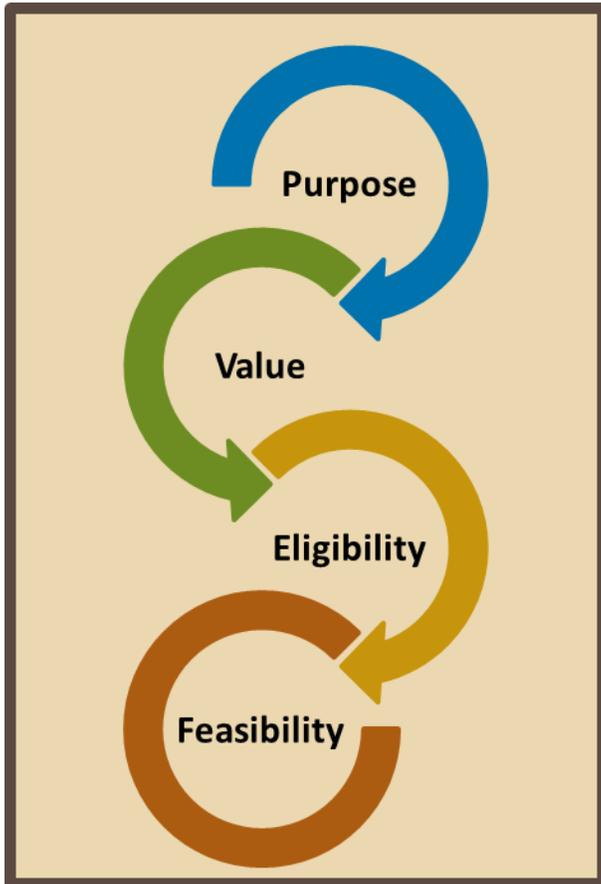
The tribe will determine whether these potential benefits are of value, or applicable to the tribal health department, tribal leaders, stakeholders, and others involved in decision making. However, it is important to note that becoming accredited does not guarantee the benefits mentioned above.

Eligibility: All health departments must meet eligibility requirements for public health accreditation. PHAB uses the following definition of eligibility for a tribal public health department.

“A tribal health department is defined, for the purposes of accreditation, as a federally recognized tribal government,¹⁰ tribal organization or inter-tribal consortium as defined in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, as amended, with jurisdictional authority to provide public health services, as evidenced by constitution, resolution, ordinance, executive order or other legal means, intended to promote and protect the tribe’s overall health, wellness and safety; prevent disease; and respond to issues and events. Federally recognized tribal governments may carry out the above public health functions in a cooperative manner through formal agreement, formal partnership or formal collaboration.”

Understanding the CHA Process

Figure 4: Considerations for applying for public health accreditation



A tribal health department may function as described above. However, if its authority is not formally evidenced, documented, or supported in the Tribe's constitution, or other legal document (such as by Tribal constitution, resolution, ordinance, executive order, or other legal means), the documentation must be developed and approved, and then submitted with the accreditation application.

For more information about documentation of a tribal health department authority to conduct public health activities, reference PHAB's Standards and Measures Version 1.0, Domain 12, standard 12.1, measure 12.1.1A. A Tribal Public Health Code is a viable means for documenting authority and can also be a useful means for addressing other standards and measures related to public health law.

Feasibility: Along with the potential benefits and value, tribes should consider the resources, time and effort required to complete the entire process for seeking accreditation. There are applicant fees for PHAB accreditation. The fee for the health department is based on the size of the population served. The fees are available on

the PHAB website, and can be paid in one lump sum, in multiple year increments, or with end of the year internal or external funds. Tribal health departments should factor in the cost of not only the application fee, but the time and efforts spent on the accreditation process and the prerequisites, including the Tribal CHA. Tribal health departments may use internal or external funding sources for accreditation fees and its associated costs. The timeframe for preparing for accreditation varies by health department. The process for seeking public health department accreditation is a multi-step process described on PHAB's website (www.phaboard.org).



PHAB Documents and Supporting Materials

- **PHAB Website: <http://www.phaboard.org>**
- **PHAB Guide to National Public Health Department Accreditation**
- **PHAB National Public Health Department Readiness Checklists**
- **PHAB Standards and Measures Version 1.0**



Checklist of Recommended Activities

- **Learn about PHAB and visit the website**
- **Obtain PHAB Resources**
- **Complete readiness checklists**
- **Become familiar with the steps of the application process, and the pre-requisites**

