

Conference Tracks & Learning Objectives

Theme

Looking to the Future: Reshaping the Public Health System

Tracks

1. Behavioral Health
2. Climate Change
3. Communications and Messaging
4. Health Equity and Social Justice
5. Leadership, Management, and Workforce Development
6. Public Health Policy and Law
7. Surveillance, Informatics, and Data Systems

Track Descriptions

Track 1: Behavioral Health

Public health serves a unique role compared to traditional behavioral health services with its focus at the community level. While many local health departments (LHD) do include mental health services and substance abuse treatment among their programs, many others focus their efforts more on strengthening prevention programs, building community resiliency, collecting reliable data, and developing effective policy. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and opioid epidemic has resulted in public health staff experiencing intense trauma that must be addressed by leadership. This track aims to highlight the innovative, data-driven approaches used by health departments, in collaboration with other partners, to address behavioral health issues in the community and within their own health departments. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Education related to substance abuse, mental health, and violence (including self-harm)
- Effective strategies or programs, particularly those involving trauma-informed and/or prevention-driven approaches, to address behavioral health issues
- Using insights from data to combat the consequences of the opioid crisis
- Demonstrating the relationships among social determinants of health and health outcomes related to substance abuse, mental health, and violence
- Resiliency and its role in mental health
- Positive youth development interventions or intentional processes that provide all youth with the support, relationships, experiences, resources, and opportunities needed to become competent, thriving adults
- Supporting staff who have experienced trauma and mental health concerns related to their work in public health

Track 2: Climate Change

Rising temperatures, changing weather patterns, and other effects of climate change are placing human health at risk. Increasing threats to health include worsening air and water quality, increased exposure to vector-borne and infectious diseases, threats to food security, and increased mental health and stress-related disorders. The impacts to health burden certain populations disproportionately, including but not limited to, communities of color, immigrant populations, tribal communities, children and older adults, people with disabilities or health conditions, low-income communities, and pregnant people. This track will showcase what LHDs are doing to identify, prevent, and respond to climate-related health issues in an equitable manner. Topics include but are not limited to:

- Assessing risks and promoting effective interventions to address health impacts (e.g., air quality, water quality and security, vector-borne diseases, infectious diseases, mental health, stress-related disorders, food safety and security, etc.)
- Upstream (i.e., preventive) approaches to reducing the health impacts of climate change

- Co-benefits of climate change resilience and mitigation (e.g., boosting local economy, job creation, health equity)
- Epidemiology of climate change and health
- Climate and health communication (e.g., countering misinformation around environmental disasters, engaging policymakers, etc.)
- Using data to communicate the local and hyperlocal impacts of climate change (e.g., storytelling through maps)
- Leaning on cross-sector/public-private partnerships to mobilize action
- Impact of climate change on local wildlife health, ecosystems, and local tourism
- Adapting LHD priorities and building capacity to respond to and mitigate erratic health outbreaks associated with climate change (e.g., expansion of disease-carrying insects, disasters in areas previously designated by FEMA as low risk, etc.)
- The role of LHDs in addressing climate change and its health impact on people with disabilities; youth; LGBTQIA+ communities; people with minimal to no English language proficiency; refugees; pregnant people; agricultural workers/other outdoor laborers; and immigrants

Track 3: Communications and Messaging

Local health departments can be instrumental in educating community partners and the public at large about health issues and empowering them to create healthier communities. Strong communication strategies, comprehensive marketing plans, and effective messaging efforts are critical to achieving success in improving equitable health outcomes in a community. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought public health communications to the forefront as public health agencies must communicate rapidly changing data, required safety measures, and where to seek testing and vaccinations. Moreover, there is a constant fight against misinformation that makes communications more challenging. This track will focus on effective communications strategies including use of traditional media, the role of social media, and how to address misinformation in a fractured media environment. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Media campaigns and other communication strategies that have successfully shifted public awareness and perception of critical health issues and resulted in action and change in health behaviors and health status
- Communication tools to connect with underserved, hard to reach communities
- Use of social media to promote your message
- Strategies to address misinformation related to public health issues
- Communicating with the public in times of crisis
- Building relationships with the media to promote local public health and improve risk communication
- Develop local public health department capacity for advocacy work to effectively deliver critical health education messages to media, legislators, partners, stakeholders, individuals, and the community at large
- Use technology to communicate key health messages to target audiences

Track 4: Leadership, Management, and Workforce Development

Assuring a competent workforce is an ongoing challenge for LHDs contending with shrinking budgets and resources, staff reductions, increasing workloads, and ever-changing public health threats. To meet the changing health needs of our communities, we must expand our workforce capacity to support both direct service and population-based public health practice. Public health leadership requires training and capacity building in both content and essential skills to lead during today's complex, multi-stakeholder environment that is fraught with political and social, and economic pressures and considerations. High turnover rates for both LHD leadership and staff highlight the need for training that is easily accessible to encourage regular upskilling. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Designing and implementing measures that strengthen and support LHDs to effectively recruit, train and retain a strong public health workforce
- Defining and operationalizing local public health roles and responsibilities that promote the importance of training activities and retention initiatives
- Identifying gaps in staff knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to navigate the complex environment of local public health; assessment of

- organizational and individual needs; and implementation of training and development activities
- Developing and maintaining partnerships that help LHDs provide necessary training and education for a qualified workforce and offer opportunities for students seeking careers in public health
- Exploring the challenges and opportunities for assessing and expanding the role of LHDs in advancing social and economic change and health equity and building the skills of leadership and workforce to support equity
- Building capacity to meet and address accreditation requirements
- Educating governing entities regarding the importance, value, and impact of public health and adequate funding of local health departments

Track 5: Health Equity and Social Justice

Now with greater awareness and urgency, health equity has become a priority in many LHDs as we recognize that inequitable health outcomes can be mitigated but not eliminated by conventional programs and services. Instead, eradicating health inequity requires strategies for acting on its root causes through our social, political, and economic systems and powers. These long-established systems are what continue to maintain social inequities and the inequities in poor health, chronic stress, and premature death that result from them. This track will explore what LHDs are doing to advance health equity and social justice. Abstract submissions may highlight efforts to:

- Target the systems and structures creating inequity and explore strategies that create prerequisite conditions for achieving health equity
- Expand the public health evidence base beyond the bio-medical model to include environmental, social, economic, and political influences
- Recognize community members as primary authority figures and partners by deferring to, integrating and/or elevating the voices of said community members in: (1) explaining and shaping community culture; (2) examining structures of organized power that affect health outcomes; (3) dramatizing injustices as shared experiences (not isolated issues) to raise public concern; and (4) acknowledging and uplifting the voices of those experiencing the injustices being addressed
- Promote relationship-building with community organizers, social movements, and affected community members to help build community power to address health inequities
- Strategize to act on the root causes of health inequity by emphasizing the organized structures/systems and intentional power arrangements that perpetuate and maintain inequities across health outcomes and social determinant of health conditions
- Make data collection, monitoring and use more participatory and actionable utilizing community-based participatory research methodologies
- Engage in dialogue and action with the public health workforce and with partnering organizations to infuse principles and practices associated with health equity and social justice into all aspects of work
- Explore the impact of corporate and government decisions that exclude and marginalize populations and generate housing, educational, and occupational segregation
- Hire and support staff from the community that reflect the populations being served and/or who have multi-disciplinary backgrounds, including commitment, creativity, and sensitivity about what it means to work for social justice
- Establish and/or support formal mechanisms from which to address health equity and social justice, including through Offices of Health Equity and community-based health equity coalitions
- Conduct health equity audits or health equity impact assessments, which evaluate the impact of a program, policy, or initiative on the health of a population
- Collectively challenge or subvert dominant narratives that affirm the ideas, thoughts or beliefs that inform decisions that lead to or further health inequities
- Develop a compelling collective public narrative with a shared agenda to mobilize the public and other organizations and agencies to advance health equity
- Expand the boundaries about what constitutes legitimate public health practice

Track 6: Public Health Policy and Law

Local health departments play a critical role in detecting emerging trends and developing strategies to address related public health policy implications. This track will explore how LHDs are developing public health policies, plans, and laws to respond to emerging trends. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- New technology (e.g., healthcare in the digital age; use and exchange of health information)
- Social determinants and policy approaches to health equity (e.g., addressing housing ordinances; food insecurity; planning of built environments and the role of public health; transportation and accessibility; community green spaces; cultural competence)
- Mental health (e.g., trauma-informed policies and approaches; new epidemiology of mental health trends; intersections with risk behaviors)
- Disease transmission, patterns, and trends in the era of global travel and mass transit
- Substance use (e.g., opioid crisis, changing marijuana laws, e-cigarettes)
- The rise of misinformation and disinformation
- Educating policymakers on public health issues
- Disaster preparedness and whole community planning
- Climate change
- Immigrant and refugee health (i.e., federal, state, and local policies)
- Disability inclusion and health of people with disabilities
- Infectious Disease
- Environmental Health

Track 7: Surveillance, Informatics, and Data Systems

In an increasingly electronic world, harnessing information to improve health outcomes requires optimal systems and cross-sector partnerships to access, analyze, and act on data in a timely, efficient, and secure manner. This track will showcase stakeholder efforts and explore how LHDs are using surveillance, informatics, and data systems to collaborate, establish new and enhance existing infrastructure, and apply necessary skills to improve delivery of public health services by getting data into the right hands, in the right format, at the right time. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Information systems and use of health information technology to improve population health
- Use of data analytics, including big data to understand population health
- Disease transmission, patterns, and trends in the era of global travel and mass transit
- Governance, including laws, policies, and standards that affect information exchange
- Innovations and novel applications of information and technology—including tools for analysis and visualization (e.g., R, GIS, Python, SAS, Tableau)—to create solutions that address pressing public health challenges
- Delivering accurate, accessible, and actionable health information that is targeted and tailored
- Activities to facilitate the meaningful use of health IT and the exchange of health information among public health professionals, healthcare, and other stakeholders
- Challenges and logistics of implementing telehealth
- Interoperability of technology systems in the 21st century
- Understanding the emerging cyber threat landscape
- Addressing and combating phishing attacks and malware
- Disaster preparedness planning