



STATE REPORT - VERMONT
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Projects/Activities Addressed This Year

There are currently 73 Public Health Nurses (PHN) employed by the Vermont Department of Health statewide, with 55 nurses working at the community level in 12 geographically distributed district offices, and 18 nurses working in central office. The Chief of Public Health Nursing position supports nursing throughout the five divisions of the department.

Accomplishments/Ongoing Activities

- Initiated meetings with University and College Schools of Nursing to update existing agreements that allow for a more streamlined placement of nursing students at VDH as part of their community health nursing curriculum.
- Attended a meeting represented by the five Vermont State Colleges to discuss health care professional needs in Vermont. Very encouraged by the addition of a BSN program at one of the colleges and plans to implement an online RN to BSN program within 2-3 years.
- Collaborated with AHEC to jointly provide school nurse interactive television trainings during each school year. The focus of the trainings are being modified to reflect best practice in school and population health nursing.
- Increased the visibility of the Health Department's Provider Unit for nursing continuing education with the goal of promoting quality education for more nurses at future training opportunities.
- PHNs, both centrally and in the district offices, demonstrated outstanding leadership during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. VT choose to implement school based H1N1 vaccination clinics, a large undertaking since VT had no recent prior history of offering vaccinations in the school setting. This, in addition to other vaccination venues offered as part of our effort, led Vermont to having the

- nation's 2d highest rate of H1N1 vaccination among its school age population and allowed 1/3rd of the entire state population to receive the vaccine.
- Continued to work on a PHN expedited Hire into Range process. The goal is for new PHNs to have their salary begin at a higher step level than the base, without requiring hire managers to provide written justification to the Department of Human Resources for each new hire.
 - Continued to revise the online clinical procedure manual by collaborating with a rotating team of staff from the district offices.
 - Because VDH has lost about 30% of its PHNs through attrition and position reductions over the last year, the role of the PHN is continuing to evolve. The focus is increasingly on population health and systems improvement at the state and community levels and less on direct client interactions.
 - Provided information to Vermont Senator as a result of his request for input on the needs for nursing in Vermont.
 - Planning for a statewide PHN meeting this fall, which will be the first such event in over 15 years.

Opportunities for improvement

- Similar to other states, the rate of pay for PHNs is not competitive with private employers. To make it more challenging, all employees will be experiencing a 3% pay cut and 2 year salary freeze beginning in July 2010. It is crucial to focus on assuring that current PHNs feel valued and that future nurses are attracted to Public Health.
- Efforts will need to be made to help some PHNs adjust to increasingly population focused roles in the community.
- The VDH is part of the Agency of Human Services, containing various departments. Efforts need to be made to ensure that salaries for nurses throughout the agency are aligned, so that nurses from VDH are not drawn to other department nursing positions where they are offered more pay.