

Enhancing the Capacity of Public Health Nursing through Partnerships:
Association for State and Territorial Directors of Nursing (ASTDN)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
& Partners' Cooperative Agreement

State Public Health Nursing Executive Leadership Functions

Public health nursing leaders are a critical component of the executive infrastructure of many state health departments. The nurses who serve in top state public health nursing positions provide leadership to fulfill the core public health functions and provide essential public health services in the context of a state health department's mission, vision, goals and objectives. Their titles vary, ranging from "public health nursing director" to "chief nurse" to "public health nursing coordinator". While the titles may vary, the importance of these positions does not.

Top level state health department public health nursing leaders are responsible for the professional practice of public health nursing at the state and local levels. Public health nurses (PHNs) comprise the largest group of professionals in public health, 11% of the total workforce. PHNs are integral to the public health infrastructure and play an essential role in the health of many communities, especially rural areas. The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and the Council of State Governments (CSG) recently completed a survey of state health officials in state public health agencies and found that the most significant worker shortages exist in public health nursing. Public health nursing directors/chiefs/coordinators in state health departments are critical to assuring the availability of an effective PHN workforce.

This document identifies a set of ten critical state-level public health nursing functions and a set of measurable activities that delineate the scope of that function.¹ It also describes the skills,

State Public Health Nursing Executive Leadership Functions

The state public health nursing leader:

1. Provides leadership, direction and expertise in policy development
2. Represents the state health department in all matters related to nursing and public health nursing
3. Assures the effectiveness, efficiency, accessibility, and quality of public health nursing programs and services
4. Assures a workforce adequate to meet the nursing needs of the state
5. Links with educational systems to the assure the quality of the future public health nursing workforce
6. Administers personnel and fiscal operations for the state public health nursing unit
7. Directs public health nursing role in emergency preparedness
8. Oversees public health nursing services statewide

¹ See Methodology in Appendix A

knowledge, abilities and values expected of a top level state health department public health nursing leader. This list of functions is offered as a “template” to state health department officials for their use in creating position descriptions, prioritizing work assignments, and other purposes. It is not intended that every state public health nursing director would be responsible for every activity identified in this document. However, most top level state health department public health nursing leader do some activity within each of the ten functions.

The State Public Health Nursing Director/Chief Nurse:

1. Provides leadership, direction and expertise in policy development

- A. Coordinates state level public health nursing policy with federal, state, local, and tribal health departments; public health nursing organizations and professional groups; health care providers and organizations; and private and non-profit agencies
- B. Promotes state health department initiatives and policies with internal and external stakeholders
- C. Analyzes and interprets national and state policy changes, legislation, and regulations that impact public health nursing practice, programs and professional issues
- D. Monitors trends in population health and interprets implications for public health, the practice of public health nursing, and nursing
- E. Formulates state health department positions on legislative initiatives impacting public health, public health nursing practice, and nursing
- F. Participates in state health department's internal processes resulting in plans and decisions impacting the operations or responsibilities discharged by public health nurses at state or local levels, including the setting of financial and organizational goals
- G. Reports to the state legislature both orally and in writing on issues germane to public health, the practice of public health nursing, and nursing
- H. Utilizes involvement in professional organizations to influence national and state legislative issues affecting public health, public health nursing and nursing

2. Represents the state health department in all matters related to nursing and public health nursing

- A. Serves as liaison with the state board of nursing and professional nursing organizations in all matters relating to the practice of public health nursing
- B. Advocates with the state board of nursing on issues that impact nursing and the practice of public health nursing, such as licensure requirements
- C. Consults with and provides nursing expertise to other units within the state health department as well as other state departments on health and human service policies and programs
- D. Represents public health nursing on state and national organizations, boards, coalitions, committees, and task forces that impact population health
- E. Serves as the official state health department representative to the Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing (ASTDN, the nursing affiliate of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials)
- F. Coordinates public health nursing activities with other state public health nursing directors

3. Assures the effectiveness, efficiency, accessibility, and quality of public health nursing programs and services in the state

- A. Coordinates planning and evaluation of public health nursing programs and activities in the state
- B. Establishes and maintains a system of quality assurance, improvement, and oversight of public health nursing practice through policies and procedures, protocols, evidence-based practice guidelines, and performance measures
- C. Seeks and procures adequate financial resources for public health nursing programs and services
- D. Develops and advocates staffing patterns that support quality public health nursing services
- E. Monitors and analyzes the impact of state and federal laws, rules and regulations, including the state nurse practice act, on public health nursing practice
- F. Interprets, monitors, and assures compliance with licensure and credentialing regulatory requirements as defined by licensing boards, state statutes and accrediting bodies
- G. Provides evidence-based consultation and technical assistance on the public health nursing role in population-based programs including but not limited to: community assessment, community engagement, communicable disease prevention and control, immunizations, emergency preparedness, maternal and child health services, chronic disease prevention and management, disease and disability services, injury prevention, and family planning

4. Assures a workforce adequate to meet the public health nursing needs of the state

- A. Communicates nursing workforce issues and needs to policy makers
- B. Works with nursing organizations, colleges and universities, and other stakeholders to increase the pool of available nurses
- C. Develops marketing strategies to recruit public health nurses for state and local health departments
- D. Assures all new public health nurses receive a timely orientation to their public health nursing role
- E. Develops effective retention strategies such as workplace design and job design, competitive salary and benefits, flexible scheduling, recognition, and advancement opportunities
- F. Recommends qualifications for public health nursing leadership positions
- G. Participates in the recruitment and selection of public health nursing leaders
- H. Develops, sponsors or assures access to ongoing continuing education events

5. Links with educational systems to assure the quality of the future public health nursing workforce

- A. Meets regularly with deans, directors, and/or faculty of baccalaureate nursing programs in the state

- B. Coordinates with nursing schools and other educational entities to assure quality clinical experiences for students in public health nursing and related disciplines
- C. Collaborates with colleges and universities in developing public health nursing curricula for undergraduate and graduate programs
- D. Serves as adjunct faculty or guest lecturer for undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs
- E. Develops and promotes opportunities for student internships and graduate fellowships
- F. Links academic institutions with health departments to conduct research on improving population health

6. Directs and coordinates the public health nursing role in emergency preparedness

- A. Participates in the development, implementation and evaluation of state emergency preparedness and response plans
- B. Serves as member of the State Public Health Emergency response team
- C. In collaboration with emergency preparedness and/or response partners, determines the appropriate role of public health nursing in emergency preparedness planning and response
- D. Communicates resource needs for public health nurse emergency preparedness to policy-makers
- E. Assures that all public health nurses are prepared with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively respond to emergencies
- F. Assures that all public health nurses participate in emergency preparedness exercises (drills, tabletops, functional, full-scale)
- G. Assists public health nurses in developing their roles related to the Strategic National Stockpile management and distribution, including the establishment of mass clinics for immunization or dispensing
- H. Where appropriate, collaborates with American Red Cross and other organizations to assure quality and appropriate staffing of local shelters during times of disasters and emergencies

7. Manages personnel and fiscal operations for the state public health nursing unit

- A. Recruits, selects, and retains public health nursing staff
- B. Delegates and assigns work duties
- C. Supervises staff, assesses employee performance and ensures professional development
- D. Prepares, develops and advocates for the nursing unit's operating and capital budgets
- E. Manages, monitors, and evaluates annual public health nursing program budgets

8. Oversees public health nursing services state

- A. States with a Centralized Infrastructure

- i. Directs statewide population-based and/or personal health services including but not limited to: community assessment, community engagement, communicable disease prevention and control, immunizations, emergency preparedness, maternal and child health services, chronic disease prevention and management, disease and disability services, injury prevention, family planning and primary health care
 - ii. Develops and monitors program budgets to assure appropriate staffing patterns, supplies and equipment for the provision of client services
 - iii. Establishes and maintains quality care standards through the development of clinical guidelines, procedures, policies, protocols
 - iv. Develops, implements, and monitors the quality of public health nursing contracts and agreements
- B. States with a Decentralized Infrastructure
- i. Assures the delivery of technical assistance and consultation on clinical guidelines, procedures, policies, protocols to local and tribal health departments and communities
 - ii. Advocates for the availability and quality of population-based and/or personal health services such as community assessment, community engagement, communicable disease prevention and control, immunizations, emergency preparedness, maternal and child health services, chronic disease prevention and management, disease and disability services, injury prevention, family planning and primary health care

State Public Health Nursing Leadership: Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, Values

Knowledge Required of a State Public Health Nursing Leader

The public health nursing executive leader is knowledgeable in:

1. The philosophy, principles, practices, and theories of public health, nursing and public health nursing
2. Principles and practices of health promotion, health education, risk management, community assessment, program planning and evaluation
3. The epidemiology of infectious and chronic disease
4. The organization of the public health delivery system
5. Federal, state, county, and/or tribal laws and statutes; local ordinances; codes, rules and regulations related to public health
6. State board of nursing practice laws, rules and regulations
7. Knowledge management and information systems
8. Health care financing
9. The determinants of health and their importance
10. The principles and practices of cultural competence, including the impact of culture on health
11. Roles and responsibilities of public health in emergency preparedness and response planning
12. The principles and practices of leadership
13. The principles and practices of management, administration, supervision
14. Human resource management
15. Financial management including budget preparation and planning
16. Quality assurance models, policies, procedures
17. Research and evaluation methodologies

Skills Required of a State Public Health Nursing Leader

The public health nursing executive leader:

1. Effectively leads teams and works cooperatively and productively in a team
2. Provides and seeks timely, open and honest feedback
3. Produces cogent and persuasive written materials to address public health nursing and organizational issues appropriate to the audience
4. Communicates effectively in crisis and high-risk situations
5. Listens to and acknowledges others' perspectives
6. Synthesizes complex and frequently conflicting information into meaningful statements
7. Articulates the mutual benefit of diversity
8. Applies the nursing process across culturally diverse populations
9. Establishes and maintains effective interpersonal working relationships
10. Interprets federal, state, county, laws and statutes; local ordinances; codes, rules and regulations related to public health
11. Monitors program performance and manages programs within budget constraints
12. Formulates and monitors nursing standards, policies and procedures
13. Prepares proposals for funding from external sources

14. Applies basic human relations skills to the management of organizations, motivation of personnel, and resolution of conflicts
15. Plans, organizes, supervises, directs and evaluates the performance of employees
16. Manages information systems for collection, retrieval, and use of data for decision-making

Abilities required of a State Public Health Nursing Leader

The public health nursing executive leader:

1. Translates a strategic vision into compelling and motivating messages
2. Interprets and communicates the specific and overall significant aspects of the health department's work as well as those of public health nursing
3. Transforms self and organization by moving beyond traditional, patterned ways of success
4. Inspires, structures, and effectively implements organizational change in an inclusive way
5. Connects broad social, economic and political changes to the strategic direction of institutions and organizations
6. Analyzes problems, situations, policies, issues, identifies alternative solutions, projects consequences of proposed actions and implements recommendations
7. Speaks comfortably and effectively in public, planned or impromptu
8. Develops and sustains trust
9. Leads in challenging or adverse circumstances; exercises independent judgment under complex circumstances; makes decisions and acts quickly in emergency situations
10. Negotiates relationships with partners and stakeholders
11. Establishes and maintains cooperative working relationships with a wide range of other divisions, agencies, groups, individuals and communities
12. Establishes rapport and deals tactfully with persons from varied ethnic, cultural and/or economic backgrounds
13. Creates forums and involves stakeholders in mutual decision-making
14. Negotiates with broad range of professionals and health systems
15. Applies epidemiological principles and practices; analyzes data, interprets and applies findings
16. Assesses budgetary needs, develops and presents budgets and business plans
17. Negotiates and manages contracts and grants
18. Articulates federal and state payment systems and regulations which affect the public health system's finances
19. Develops standards and criteria for quality assurance programs; initiates efforts to improve the quality and performance of public health and public health nursing services

Values Required of a State Public Health Nursing Leader

The public health nursing executive leader:

1. Models and upholds professional nursing standards and ethics
2. Demonstrates ethical behavior and personal authenticity
3. Demonstrates commitment to social justice, compassion, sensitivity to diversity, and respect for the worth of all people, especially the vulnerable
4. Demonstrates principles and values that model those of the organization
5. Maintains a positive, caring and compassionate attitude
6. Represents self and others accurately and fairly, without bias or prejudice
7. Models personal accountability for results or mistakes
8. Committed to continued professional and personal self development

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