

Strengthening Disability Inclusion Efforts within Local Health Departments: Successes and Challenges

Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services, Long Beach, California

(<https://www.longbeach.gov/health/>)



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Background

The Long Beach Health Department is one of three city-led health departments in California. It has a diverse population of over 500,000 people, including a large Khmer-speaking community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it developed several initiatives to ensure that all members of the community had access to important health information and services.

These initiatives included creating a:

- COVID-19 Task Force to gather input from community members and organizations on how to make information and services more accessible.
- Language Access team to translate information and resources into English, Spanish, Tagalog, and Khmer.
- VaxLB web page to provide up-to-date information on vaccine and testing clinics.
- Outreach team to visit homes and businesses and connect people with resources.
- Call center to answer questions and provide information in multiple languages.
- Mobile Vaccine Team to provide vaccines to people who were unable to leave their homes.

In late 2021, PHEM hired a Disability, Access, and Functional Needs Coordinator and a Whole Community Planning Specialist to build on existing efforts to promote equity, accessibility, and inclusion. Collectively they have applied for and secured grants from the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) to support disability inclusion within emergency management.

Project Description

The development of our action plan place in Long Beach, California on behalf of the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Emergency Management (PHEM) Division. Given the grant timeframe, we included one activity in our action plan which was to develop a disability etiquette training for our health department. The purpose is to train our health department staff, which is comprised of public health professionals, healthcare providers, community workers, and first responders, on disability awareness and best practices regarding the inclusive treatment of and interaction with disabled people. The training will provide an overlook of intersectionality as it relates to disability, a brief but impactful history of the disability civil rights movement, general information on how to treat disabled stakeholders with respect and dignity, and assess participant disability awareness with a pre-and post-knowledge quiz.

We hope this training will create an enhanced culture of care within our health department and will ensure the department serves Long Beach's disability population in an equitable manner to minimize or eliminate uncomfortable experiences for those with disabilities in our programming and at our facilities. Our intermediate goal is to provide this training to our local partners as well as record the training so it can be shared digitally.

The Disability, Access, and Functional Needs team led this effort with the assistance of our Public Health Emergency Management Division's information production and graphics team, which arranged the information we had outlined and gathered into a slide deck. We sought guidance on the outline and presentation from our Citywide Accessibility coordinator, who is a subject matter expert on disability awareness and facilitates an annual Disability Pride event in July. Additionally, we received further feedback and guidance on the disability etiquette training presentation from our city's Citizen's Advisory Commission on Disability.

Challenges

The only item we included in our action plan was the development of disability etiquette training. Below are some of the challenges we encountered.

- It was the first collective task we had worked on as a Disability, Access, and Functional Needs team. The team was fairly new, and for some on the team it was their first job ever and for others, it was their first job working in local government.
- Regarding the action plan, there was an overabundance of information regarding etiquette toward specific types of disabilities. We are afraid of overwhelming our audience.
- Finding ways to organize and condense vast amounts of information without omitting essential information.
- Accessibility challenges on Canva, the online graphic design platform the city prefers we use. We used Canva and are planning to transfer to PowerPoint, but the formatting does not stay the same in the transfer process so we will have to edit once more.
- Generational differences within the team in identifying appropriate practices for participants to learn about people with disabilities: e.g. Stimulus training
- Due to the bureaucratic structure of the health department, our presentation template had to be reviewed and approved. Additionally, a handful of approvals had to be attained prior to receiving approval to present the training to the health department and to offer the training on an ongoing basis.

[STORIES FROM THE FIELD]

August 2023



Solutions to Challenges

To be inclusive and effective in our work, the team established communication preferences and other accommodations since most of the team has a disability. It was a learning process for everyone on the team as well as for everyone that was involved in the development of the disability etiquette training. These conversations were pivotal in setting the tone for the importance of discussing disability awareness. Just in these interactions alone, we saw our public health emergency management team addressing our needs in a more inclusive way per their questions and follow-up interactions.

Regarding the disability etiquette training, to solve our overabundance of information for this presentation we addressed disability more generally rather than including recommendations for each category of disability. We convened several times to reorganize our slides and include clear transitions from topic to topic. We moved more specific instructions to an Appendix for Further Reading which will be sent to participants after they complete the training. We met several times with subject matter experts to distill the most important information. We also met with the health department director's assistant to share the importance of the training to expedite the approval process.

Results

In addition to our action plan, our team partnered with a disability organization to conduct five zine workshops to collect stories and experiences on how COVID-19 impacted their lives and how they accessed the city's public health emergency management resources information/resources. A total of 94 people participated and 72 zines were created and expressed in English, Spanish, and Khmer. We paired the workshops with a paper survey to attain demographic data and responses to questions that may not have been addressed in a zine. We collected 268 surveys from the workshops and one community event. We were successful in engaging older adults and families with children with disabilities, but not successful in engaging teenagers and mid-age adults with disabilities. We believe this was due to a lack of transportation to our workshops and access to other disability organizations.

Short-term

- Conduct the disability etiquette training in August 2023 for health department staff.
- Have Public Health Emergency Management team complete KultureCity's first responder sensory training by October 20th.

Intermediate

- Foster relationships with local and regional disability organizations.

- Engage health department staff to change attitudes/interactions with disabled members of the public.
- Digitize the zine workshop survey and make it available citywide.

Long-term

- Work with the human resources department to integrate NACCHO's disability 101 training for new and existing city employees.

Lessons Learned

We believe that our project succeeded because we were able to attain information from our community on how we provided COVID-19 resources and information. In the process, we distributed preparedness kits and educational resources on how to prepare for an emergency. Information gathered from the zine workshops will guide the public health emergency management team in developing strategies on how to better support our community during an emergency, as well as make changes in areas of communication and mental health resources. Utilizing zine workshops as an unconventional method for data gathering has started conversations on how we can utilize them to educate on public health topics such as STIs and HIV. Zines have the potential for increasing engagement with teenagers and adults.

Lessons Learned

- Coordinate project-sharing calls with department leadership and the language access team early on to get them to champion and support your efforts.
- Visit the workshop space a day before or several times before to engage with potential participants and share upcoming workshops/activities/events. Recruit bi-literate and bicultural staff or community members that are leaders in these community spaces to help you promote your activity.
- Debrief after every activity to make improvements for upcoming activities.

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NACCHO

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The mission of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) is to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments.

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