

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

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Background

Huron County Public Health (HCPH) is a Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB)- accredited combined health district. HCPH serves residents of Huron County, Ohio, and through a contract for services, the City of Bellevue, Ohio. In total, HCPH serves approximately 66,000 residents in their rural jurisdiction, which contains three small cities (Norwalk, Willard, and Bellevue), seven villages, and nineteen townships. HCPH has a limited history of efforts specifically focused on disability inclusion. Although some programs had elements of support for disability inclusion, HCPH is now intentionally aiming to improve inclusion efforts through all programs and services offered. In support of these efforts, HCPH maintains existing working relationships with other local agencies working in the disability space, such as the Huron County Board of Developmental Disabilities and Enrichment Centers for Huron County.

Project Description

HCPH's action plan aimed to meet the needs of people with disabilities in their community by first providing disability training and information to their staff to support accessibility across all of HCPH's programs and services. The majority of HCPH's staff completed NACCHO's *Health and Disability 101 training for Health Department Employees* and select staff completed the communication-specific inclusion training, *ADA Audio Conference Series: Accessible Social Media 2.0*. All staff were also provided with local resources for people with disabilities. In an effort to further assess accessibility needs, HCPH worked with local disability partners to create and distribute a community survey to see how they can improve the accessibility of agency programs and services. To ensure accessible communications, HCPH's Public Information Officer also reviewed and revised communication resources to ensure accessible communication standards for printed materials, social media, and online/virtual meetings. A final focus of the action plan was ensuring ADA compliance of physical facilities while the agency underwent renovations to its facilities. All activities took place in Norwalk, Ohio.

Challenges

Limited Participation: One challenge HCPH encountered when implementing their action plan were the community surveys. They shared the survey with disability partners to distribute to their clients and posted the survey on social media sites as well, but the participation

and feedback from clients and/or community members was minimal; ultimately, only four responses were received.

Funding Constraints: A second challenge was identifying and securing funding to implement the needs identified through the action plan. For example, one of the physical facility challenges that still exist is the exterior doors to the facility, which are difficult for some individuals to open. For this reason, HCPH hopes to install powered door openers for the exterior doors that open with the push of a button. However, these types of door openers are costly, and openers would need to be installed on four doors. Because of this, HCPH is still researching resources for grants that may assist them with installation of these types of door openers.

Solutions to challenges

To overcome the survey challenge, NACCHO Health and Disability Fellow Nic Wyatt provided suggestions to HCPH for survey dissemination. Examples include involving other local chapters of national disability organizations, identifying local organizations that serve residents within the community, and asking current program participants/survey recipients to take the survey or share with those who may be a part of the target population. These suggestions will be considered in future surveying efforts.

To overcome the funding challenge, NACCHO Senior Program Analyst Sara Lyons provided some resources for grant funding to enable HCPH to improve their building access. HCPH plans to further investigate these suggested funding sources. In addition, one local community-based grant has been identified that HCPH plans to apply for, but funding is not guaranteed.

Results

Immediate short-term outcomes that resulted from the efforts of this funding are seen in the agency's renovations. For example, a non-ADA complaint existing bathroom was remodeled to be ADA compliant, lowered countertops were added to the remodel plan which were not originally anticipated, etc. These are environmental changes that will impact most individuals who work at and visit the facility.

Staff trainings had both short-term and long-term impacts. In the short-term, the trainings staff received got them talking about how disability inclusion should be included in the agency's efforts and enabled the staff



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to learn about the local resources available to support individuals with disabilities, which HCPH hopes will continue to impact the agency long-term as staff retain and use the knowledge gained. Staff training also had an immediate impact on communications efforts, as HCPH's Communications Plan has been updated with information for inclusive communications and both HCPH's social media channels and website are being tweaked on an ongoing basis to increase accessibility for all.

Lessons Learned

Overall, HCPH is happy to have participated in this project and view it as a success. One reason the project was a success is the sharing

of information, resources, and ideas between NACCHO and other grantees. HCPH gained insight from both. For example, another grantee shared how they utilized this funding as an opportunity to purchase sensory-friendly items for use in their medical clinic. As a result of the wrap-up meeting with NACCHO and other grantees, HCPH reached out to one of their local partners (Help Me Grow) for ideas on sensory friendly items for use with patients, as this is something HCPH felt like they could add to their efforts. In the future, HCPH would suggest grantees have more NACCHO and fellow grantee interaction, as these were some of the most beneficial elements to the funding opportunity.

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