

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

Siouxland District Health Department, Sioux City, IA



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Background

Siouxland District Health Department (SDHD) serves as the public health department for Woodbury County, Iowa (population: 105,941). Woodbury County is comprised of Sioux City (population: 85,797) and 15 other rural towns making up the remaining 20,000 residents. SDHD is the largest local public health department in western Iowa. Through the coordination and the team efforts of the Divisions of Health Promotions & Chronic Disease Prevention, Acute Infectious Disease, Epidemiology & Preparedness, Family & Community Health and Environmental Health, SDHD implements over 30 different programs and services geared towards the public health needs of individuals and families throughout Woodbury County.

SDHD began partnering with organizations that serve people with disabilities in 2015, after the University of Iowa asked SDHD to participate in their Living Well Iowa project that focused on increasing the health and medical access for people with disabilities. The All Abilities Health and Wellness Coalition was formed shortly thereafter. SDHD has had the opportunity to partner with the University of Iowa, Iowa Department of Public Health, National Association of Chronic Disease Directors and Wellmark Foundation on various grants and programs. These initiatives have led to over 124 inclusion focused PPSE changes within SDHD and the community.

Project Description

Siouxland District Health Department aimed to meet the needs of people with disabilities by implementing inclusive policy, system, or environmental changes both within their own services and within the community. SDHD in conjunction with Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Organization (SIMPCO) completed on-site CHIL assessments at SDHD, the Warming Shelter, and Plaza Bowl all which are located in Sioux City, IA. Following completion of the onsite CHIL assessments, each entity was provided a report and recommendations document which they were then able to determine what policy, system, or environmental changes to focus their own inclusion efforts on. The goal of this project was to increase SDHD's capacity to serve individuals with disabilities, provide inclusive recreational opportunities for residents with disabilities as well as reduce barriers and increase accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges we faced in implementing items on our action plan was the acquisition of supplies and equipment due to limited supply, increased demand, and shipping challenges. SDHD was extremely interested in purchasing an ADA pelvic exam table that lowered and raised making it easy for clients to get on and for staff to easily adjust, but due to production times and back orders we were not able to purchase the table. This is one of the items that we will look to purchase in the near future. The Warming Shelter, Plaza Bowl, and Ability Tech also experienced delays in manufacturing, shipping and receiving of products which in turn has pushed back installation.

We also experienced challenges in getting all employees to complete the NACCHO's *Disability and Health 101 Training for Health Department Employees* by July 22. Even after providing specific directions on creating a NACCHO account and step-by-step directions on how to register and complete the course, some employees found it difficult to complete. We sent out numerous reminders and offered to provide one-on-one assistance with registration and course completion.

Solutions to challenges

One strategy we used to overcome the challenges listed above was to work with our partners to provide more time to complete environmental changes and completion of projects. Status updates have been provided to us throughout the project. In regards to the *Health and Disability 101* course, we created a step-by-step direction on registering and completing the course. We offered technical assistance to employees requesting support and we added all the information to an online folder that all employees have access to. The training was also added to the new employee checklist which includes deadline requirements for completion and hiring directors will provide one-on-one assistance if needed.

Results

SDHD completed numerous policy, system, and environmental changes and worked with community partners to identify potential PSE changes that would benefit their clients. SDHD added a wheelchair scale and sensory friendly rooms in the clinic area, grab bars, and transfer boards in the exam rooms. SDHD began propping the door to the laboratory open during business hours and updated the contract for interpretation

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services and created a process so individuals in other departments can request services. They now have a pocketalker and magnifiers available for client use. SDHD staff completed the disability and health training, and the Branding and Style Guide was updated to include accessibility features. The Warming Shelter purchased a commercial ADA front load washing machine, a wheelchair charging station that allows users to quickly get a full charge for their chair or other motorized mobility aid. They also purchased supplies to build a ramp at the emergency exit in the male sleeping room. Plaza Bowl added adaptive equipment such as ramps, bowling ball pushers, and a retractable handle bowling ball for users of all abilities and they are also working to complete a bathroom renovation which will greatly improve overall accessibility.

Lessons Learned

Anytime a local health department, governmental agency, or a local business is open to looking at ways in which they can improve accessibility, reduce barriers, and provide more inclusive services for individuals with disabilities is a win. Sometimes the PSE changes are easy and become a quick win, and in other instances, such as changes to policies or procedures, PSE changes take time. Working

with community partners to conduct an onsite CHII assessment, provide results of the assessment, and recommend PSE changes is something that local public health agencies can easily do. These assessments help to not only educate the community but they provide concrete suggestions on things local entities can do to improve ease of access for individuals with disabilities. When doing so, you will face challenges with time, budget, and supply chains but don't let those challenges stop you. Any change, big or small, is a win for individuals who can easily access your services or those provided within your community.

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