

Environmental Public Health Performance Standards QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



What are the EnvPHPS?

The Environmental Public Health Performance Standards (EnvPHPS) are a set of 27 standards modeled after the National Public Health Performance Standards (NPHPS) and based on the ten Essential Environmental Public Health Services (EssEnvPHS) (www.nwcphp.org/centers-projects/environmental-health-center/10-essential). Each section of the EnvPHPS addresses one of the EssEnvPHS and includes standards, indicators, and questions to assist in determining to what extent an agency is meeting the target standards (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS/Docs/Env_Public_Health_Performance_DRAFT_Standards.pdf).

Why were the EnvPHPS created?

The role environmental health plays in the broader public health system has not been clearly or consistently defined. In recent years, environmental public health activities have focused on regulatory issues and have not been consistently integrated into the public health system at large. In 2002, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed the EssEnvPHS to address this lack of clarity and to describe more uniformly environmental health's role in the public health system relative to the three core functions of public health—assessment, policy development, and assurance. The EnvPHPS were developed as an instrument to measure environmental public health capacity to perform the EssEnvPHS. The EnvPHPS complement the NPHPS and can be used in conjunction with or separately from the NPHPS. (http://apha.confex.com/apha/135am/techprogram/paper_165748.htm).

What is the value of EnvPHPS?

The EnvPHPS provide an important benchmark for participating agencies to measure the capacity of their local environmental public health system or program. The assessment process encourages system or program partners to better coordinate and target their activities and is intended to provide a foundation for implementing performance improvement activities (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS/Docs/Env_Public_Health_Performance_DRAFT_Standards.pdf).

What are the goals of the EnvPHPS?

Implementation of the EnvPHPS is intended to foster environmental health excellence at the state, tribal, local, and national levels. The EnvPHPS accomplish this by assessing gaps that serve as obstacles to building individual agency capacity to provide the EssEnvPHS, encouraging communities' accountability for providing environmental health services, and promoting consistency of services across agencies (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS/Docs/Env_Public_Health_Performance_DRAFT_Standards.pdf).

What is the relationship between the EnvPHPS and the NPHPS?

The EnvPHPS were modeled after and created as a complementary tool to the NPHPS. In the past, the NPHPS were occasionally used to assess, to a limited extent, environmental health performance within the public health system; however, recent research has found that a strong correlation between the capacity of the public health system and the capacity of the environmental health agency does not always exist. The EnvPHPS were created to address this discrepancy and act as a companion tool to the NPHPS to ensure a more accurate description and measure of the environmental public health system (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS/Docs/Env_Public_Health_Performance_DRAFT_Standards.pdf).

Who should use the EnvPHPS?

The EnvPHPS should be used by local public health organizations and programs that seek to identify gaps and make improvements in the capacity of their public health systems to perform and provide the EssEnvPHS in collaboration with their environmental public health programs, partners, and practitioners. The EnvPHPS can be used to focus on a particular programmatic area of concern, such as food safety, as well as on the agency or the larger environmental public health system. Public health systems concerned specifically about environmental public health services in their communities should also consider using the EnvPHPS to create action plans that address gaps or programmatic weaknesses (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS/Docs/Env_Public_Health_Performance_DRAFT_Standards.pdf).

Should the EnvPHPS and the NPHPS be used jointly or separately? How should communities decide which performance standards to use?

Communities should consider many factors when deciding which performance standards to use. When selecting which tool to use, communities should think about specific goals. Are the identified goals broad and applicable to the entire public health system, or are they more specific to environmental health? Alternatively, is the community concerned about the division between public health and environmental health practice? Communities that initially select to implement the NPHPS may later choose to deepen their focus by using the EnvPHPS. Likewise, communities that initially complete the EnvPHPS may later choose to broaden their focus by implementing the NPHPS. For communities that have prioritized integrating their public health and environmental health programs, using the tools jointly may be an effective approach.

Reviewing and comparing the instruments may help communities decide which performance standards will best serve them. The value and ease of one instrument over another will depend on variable demographics and characteristics of the community. Consider the extent to which guidance is needed, the community's experience with environmental health assessment, and the extent to which environmental challenges are the driving force behind beginning the assessment and subsequent quality improvement process.

What are the primary benefits of implementing the EnvPHPS or NPHPS?

Implementing the EnvPHPS or the NPHPS means that a system may attain the following:

- Improved organizational and community communication and collaboration by bringing partners to the same table;
- Educated participants about public health and the interconnectedness of activities, which can lead to a greater appreciation and awareness of the many activities related to improving the public's health;
- Strengthened the diverse network of partners within state and local public health systems, which can lead to more cohesion among partners, better coordination of activities and resources, and less duplication of services; and
- Identified strengths and weaknesses to address with quality improvement efforts. Responses to the assessment can be tracked over time to identify trends, areas of improvement, or changes. Performance standards provide a benchmark for public health practice improvements.

Implementing the EnvPHPS means that an agency or system may also attain the following:

- A greater appreciation of the importance of evaluation in improving the environmental health system or a particular program;
- A better understanding of the competencies to perform the EssEnvPHS:
- A better prepared and educated environmental health workforce within the public health system; and
- The ability to approach decision-makers with information about needed improvements in the environmental health system or program (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/EnvPHPS/Docs/ Env Public Health Performance DRAFT Standards.pdf).

What resources are available to my agency to meet the EnvPHPS?

Many agencies will have one or more gaps in the EssEnvPHS. Some agencies feel they do not have extra resources to address these gaps. Agencies that have used the EnvPHPS report that they've been able to make improvements without additional resources and that building capacity in one essential service many times serves to build capacity in other related services. In addition, the CDC has provided online resources to support both the NPHPS and the EnvPHPS, including links to key Web sites and examples of resources to improve each of the EssEnvPHS (www.cdc.gov/nceh/ehs/envphps/resources.htm). Additional EnvPHPS resources, including NACCHO's archived webinar "Environmental Public Health Performance Standards: Using Standards to Improve Practice," are available on NACCHO's Community-based Environmental Health Assessment (CEHA) Web site (www.naccho.org/topics/environmental/CEHA/CEHAEnvPHPSNACCHO.cfm).

Acknowledgments

NACCHO thanks the National Public Health Performance Standards Program (NPHPSP) and CEHA staff for their contributions to this fact sheet. NACCHO also thanks National Center for Environmental Health CDC staff, Patrick Bohan, Assistant Professor of Environmental Health Science at East Central University, Sarah Kotchian, former Director of the Albuquerque Environmental Health Department and retired Associate Director of the University of New Mexico Institute for Public Health, and the NACCHO CEHA Workgroup for their input and feedback.

Contact Information

To connect with peers or to receive technical assistance for the EnvPHPS, contact CDC at ehsb@cdc.gov or (770) 488-7476, or NACCHO's CEHA Program Manager, Subha Chandar, at schandar@naccho.org or (202) 783-5550, Ext. 283. To connect with peers or to receive technical assistance for the NPHPS, contact CDC at phpsp@cdc.gov or (800) 747-7649 or NACCHO's NPHPSP Program Manager, Heidi Deutsch, at hdeutsch@naccho.org or (202) 783-5550, Ext. 252.



The National Connection for Local Public Health



NACCHO is the national organization representing local health departments. NACCHO supports efforts that protect and improve the health of all people and all communities by promoting national policy, developing resources and programs, seeking health equity, and supporting effective local public health practice and systems.

1100 17th St, NW, 2nd Floor Washington, DC 20036 P (202) 783 5550 F (202) 783 1583