

Kansas Public Health Laboratory System Performance Assessment Report

Overview:

On May 17, 2011, 57 state wide partners of the Kansas public health laboratory system met in Topeka to conduct the state's first assessment of the laboratory system. Kansas was using the recently revised national assessment tool produced by the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), and was therefore serving as a beta test for the improved assessment tool, as well as assessing the Kansas public health laboratory system. The two major functions of the event were to bring partners together, many of whom have never interacted with each other before, and then to assess the current status of the public health laboratory system, using the assessment tool based on the 10 Essential Services that have been identified as part of every public health system. The process was to help create the connection between partners and to evaluate where Kansas was in providing the essential services. Once gaps and problems were identified, it was also to start to develop potential solutions for those issues, especially given the current financial situation of the State.

Process for further action:

The predominant comment on the evaluation forms of those that participated was the assessment was only the beginning of a process of dialog and meetings to address the issues identified in the assessment. It has been the experience of other states that have gone through the assessment that the full final report takes four to six months to complete. In order to maintain interest in the process, it has been decided to produce several smaller reports based on two or three of the essential services. This will allow the individual reports to be issued as they are completed. This process, it is hoped, will keep the lines of communication that were first established at the assessment on May 17th connected, and may spur some immediate action steps to be developed based on the results of the section released, even before the full report is completed. When all reports are completed they will be combined, with any additional material, to form the final report of the assessment. This will include the next steps to continue the process of improving the Kansas public health laboratory system.

The scores and comments from the groups will be the basis of the several reports, which will likely be in blocks of two or three of the essential services (perhaps one from each of the three sub groups that were formed during the assessment process). The assembly of the reports will take some time to organize and give the final scores for the essential service. It is hoped that by breaking up the report, that it will keep it from being delayed, and that it will also keep the connections active during the entire time the report is being completed.

The results of the evaluation of the assessment have already been sent out to participants, and some comments have been received from the initial communication. The results of the evaluation were very positive for the process and the continuation of the system improvement program that has been initiated. This is part of the reason that trying to keep the lines of communication and the connections active is essential for the continued success of the program and the process.

Once the final report has been issued, it is anticipated that action groups will be formed to focus on some of the gaps and issues identified during the assessment. This would include expanding and formalizing communications and the sharing of ideas and solutions with all of the partners. Another finding was the workforce needs of the system, and finding ways of addressing recruitment and retention. A potential area of action will be addressing the long term needs of the laboratory system rather than short term political agendas. Some of these actions groups could be formed after the smaller reports come out, if that is the desire of those who receive the reports, rather than waiting until the full report is issued.