Rhode Island’s Immunization Programs

Integrating public health and primary care can both improve quality of care for a population and lower health costs. Both components of the health system share a common goal of health improvement, have similar funding streams and resources, and share many partnerships. If aligned, public health and primary care working together could achieve lasting, substantial improvements in individual and population health in the United States. State and territorial health agencies can make a significant impact in this area by decoding the key elements for successful integration, which can then be shared with others to promote further integration efforts, increase healthcare quality, lower costs, and improve overall population health.

Rhode Island’s primary care and public health integration efforts result in high vaccination rates across the state for vaccine-preventable diseases and influenza.

BACKGROUND
Leadership from the Rhode Island Department of Health, primary care and vaccine advisory committees, and other key players have contributed to successful statewide vaccination efforts, including school-based vaccinations, public clinics, and a perinatal hepatitis prevention home visiting program, among others. There are no local health departments in Rhode Island, so state public health officials collaborate closely with healthcare providers on these programs.

OVERVIEW OF THE INTEGRATION EFFORT
The department of health’s immunization program falls under the Division of Community, Family Health, and Equity and works in collaboration with the department’s Division of Infectious Disease and Epidemiology and its Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response. The collaboration between the department of health, primary care advisory committee, and vaccine advisory committee supports a strong partnership for the dissemination of vaccines across the state. Other key players include a Flu Task Force and adult and childhood immunization coalitions. The committees and task forces include members from both primary care and public health.

The state’s integrated perinatal disease prevention program for women infected with hepatitis B collaborates with the state’s home visiting program, offering home visits, vaccine education, and other services to pregnant women and families with young children. This program provides comprehensive case management services to pregnant women infected with hepatitis B virus to ensure vaccination and post-exposure prophylaxis for infants. These efforts maximize the impact of public health services, reduce disease prevalence, promote health equity, and support collaboration and integration.

The department of health’s Immunize for Life initiative targets vaccinations across the lifespan in primary care and community settings throughout Rhode Island. School-located programs help decrease and manage vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks in schools and communities. The Vaccinate Before You Graduate Program helps adolescents in grades 9-12 obtain catch-up vaccinations, and the school-
Based influenza program provides flu shots to K-12 students. When school outbreaks occur, the department uses a multi-pronged approach to coordinate mass vaccination clinics and communicate with providers, parents, and the public. The state is working to integrate Rhode Island’s immunization registry, KIDSNET, with other electronic health records, a challenge that other states and territories are also seeking to overcome.

Rhode Island’s main sources of funding for its vaccination efforts are CDC’s Vaccine for Children program for uninsured kids, federal 317 funding for uninsured adults, Medicaid, and insurer assessment funds for insured children and adults. With direct input from the state’s health plans, the state can assess the amount of funds that will be available each year to vaccinate insured adults.

RESULTS/BENEFITS
The state’s universal vaccine policy enables the department of health to distribute vaccines to providers at no charge. This makes vaccinations more cost effective and increases their availability and dissemination through primary care providers. The school-based vaccination program and participating healthcare providers report immunization data to the KIDSNET immunization registry. The current registry is specific to childhood immunizations; however, the state is moving toward developing a lifelong registry.

In 2011, vaccination rates for Rhode Island children aged 19 to 35 months exceeded national rates for eight out of nine vaccines. In 2012, coverage rates for vaccine-preventable diseases in children under age two and children entering kindergarten were 90 percent. The number of adolescent females 13 to 17 years of age who received three doses of the HPV vaccine increased from 73 to 76 percent in 2012. One hundred percent of Rhode Island pediatric providers report vaccine usage to KIDSNET. Rhode Island is ranked highest (74%) in the United States for influenza vaccination of pregnant women.²

INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND SUSTAINABILITY
In 2008, the Rhode Island Department of Health received an award from CDC’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases for its partnerships with healthcare providers, schools, and parents to maintain some of the highest childhood immunization rates in the United States for more than 10 years.³

Key factors that contribute to Rhode Island’s high vaccination rates for vaccine-preventable diseases and influenza include the implementation systems for vaccine purchase and distribution, quality assurance, public and provider education, information dissemination, surveillance, and community collaboration.

Public health and primary care in Rhode Island continue to work together to improve immunization program access, quality improvement, data collection and sharing, and other refinements needed to increase provider participation and reach more insured and uninsured children, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, healthcare workers, and other high risk groups throughout the state with important vaccines and improved population health.
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