

State Analysis and Action Guide

EBPH Planning and Implementation

This *State Analysis Guide* is intended to assist state and territorial health agency staff in analyzing their state's current evidence-based programs and policies. Based on the evidence-based public health EBPH framework, the guide directs users to resources and checklists that can help them strengthen internal knowledge and capacity and use evidence-based practices to achieve desired public health outcomes. The EBPH framework offers a process for assessing needs, selecting appropriate program and policy approaches, implementing an action plan, and evaluating the approach. Public health officials can use the EBPH framework to review existing programs and policies to ensure that they have evidence of effectiveness, as well as develop evidence-based programs and policies that address a state or community's most pressing needs. As described in the case studies and action sheets presented in this toolkit, several states have taken a systematic approach—some by adopting a pilot project aimed at adopting a specific intervention—while others, such as Colorado and New York, have adopted evidence-based practices more broadly across program areas.

Recognizing that states are approaching EBPH with differing experiences, resources, and organizational support, ASTHO developed the state analysis guide to help users analyze their current EBPH activities and organizational understanding (i.e., where they are today) and identify potential next steps for achieving desired public health outcomes. For many states, starting small with a pilot project aimed at increasing awareness, forging internal and external partnerships, and gaining experience with an evidence-based approach will be a viable and productive path forward, while others may want to look for ways to expand the use of EBPH across programs or beyond the state health agency through relationships with external partners, such as public health institutes, employers, schools, or recreation districts.

The document is divided into two sections. The analysis guide offers a series of questions aimed at helping state health agency staff members gather information about organizational capacity, policies, workforce, and sustainability. The purpose is to help users begin to identify strengths and organizational gaps that might help determine an agency's next steps. The "Moving Forward" guide is intended to help users identify options for addressing organizational needs and advancing EBPH decisionmaking.

Issues for Analysis and Where to Turn for More Information: Partners, Tools, and Resources

Taking Stock: Assessing Current EBPH Policies and Practices

Where does EBPH knowledge and leadership reside in the agency? Are there EBPH “champions” or a unit/program that performs EBPH functions? Is there support from leadership to implement evidence-based practices?

Identify current EBPH internal stakeholders and champions.

- If your state has participated in a Community Guide training or workshop, the participants may be engaging in partnership or training efforts.
- If your state has an overarching, evidence-based framework in place already (through an improvement plan, for example) EBPH knowledge may be distributed across the agency.

How does evidence currently inform programming and planning? Are there policies or procedures in place to guide state activities or are they ad hoc efforts? Did the state complete a needs assessment or improvement plan? Identify relevant policies or strategic plans that integrate evidence-based practices into public health programs and policies.

Identify current EBPH policy and planning resources, such as the following:

- State or agency-level policies or frameworks, such as New York’s Prevention Agenda or the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s use of the EBPH framework. (See New York and Colorado case studies.)
- Executive orders, legislation, or regulations that fund or require evidence-based interventions (e.g., seatbelt legislation or physical education standards).
- Program or unit-level EBPH documents, such as pilot project action plans.
- Needs assessments, worksheets that prioritize evidence-based strategies, and implementation and evaluation plans.

What are the current EBPH activities and initiatives? Is there coordination among current EBPH activities and resources? Who are the internal and external partners? Is there funding to support evidence-based activities?

Identify current activities, including:

- Intra-agency, coordinated EBPH initiatives (e.g., Colorado’s obesity integration project).
- Pilot projects to address a specific evidence-based recommendation.
 - Ad hoc or undocumented activities, such as using The Community Guide as a program planning tool or referring state or local health department staff members to Community Guide resources and tools.

Issues for Analysis and Where to Turn for More Information: Partners, Tools, and Resources

Taking Stock: Assessing Current EBPH Policies and Practices

What is known about current workforce knowledge and use of EBPH practices? Are there unmet training needs? What are staff perceptions about EBPH? What is the process for disseminating knowledge about EBPH tools and practices?

Identify workforce training and needs assessment resources, such as:

- Employee surveys that analyze current knowledge, attitudes and EBPH practices. (See New York case study for more information on staff surveys.)
- Current EBPH training activities, including participation in prevention research center training or National Network of Public Health Institutes/ASTHO Community Guide workshops.
- Train-the-trainer activities that equip department staff to train state and local health officials in EBPH practices.
- Existing partnerships with external partners—public health institutes, public health training centers, or local foundations—to develop internal workforce capacity.

How does my state sustain momentum for EBPH practices? Is there a formal framework or strategic plan that integrates EBPH practices? Or are current activities driven by an individual or a one-time project?

- Communicate with current stakeholders to understand if there are formal mechanisms (e.g., strategic plans or state-level prevention agendas) for sustaining evidence-based practices.

Moving Forward: Achieving EBPH Goals using Options and Tactics

Understanding where your state stands with EBPH policies and practices can inform future planning. Your unmet needs, available resources, and organizational support will determine the most reasonable next steps for your state. The options and tactics that follow respond to specific needs (e.g., workforce training, policy development).

Develop Workforce and Organizational Capacity. If agency leaders or staff lack understanding of evidence-based principles and practices, your state might want to focus on promoting awareness through training and education. While this objective may be geared toward states that are new to EBPH, more experienced states may also identify strategies for sharing knowledge and keeping staff informed about current activities, successes, and potential opportunities for collaboration.

- Assess staff needs and knowledge through employee survey or focus groups. Use findings to develop training that responds to their needs and preferences. (See [New York case study](#) for more information on employee surveys and their role in staff training.)
- Identify training resources, including online courses, workshops, and state team opportunities, or recruit an expert to provide basic training, either in person or through a webinar.
- Share state stories and best practices to highlight realistic approaches for applying evidence-based strategies. This EBPH toolkit, among other evidence-based resources and clearinghouses, can offer state models for translating evidence-based policy into practice.
- Engage internal and external partners to leverage technical, human, and financial resources to provide evidence-based training and implement evidence-based strategies. Public health institutes or public health training centers can contribute workforce development skills and resources (See [Colorado case study](#)).
- Identify training opportunities, such as train-the-trainer models, that disseminate expertise broadly within the agency. A small group of individuals who attend EBPH training by a prevention research center, for example, can turn around and train agency staff members.
 - Target training programs to meet staff needs. Comprehensive training may not be needed for all staff members, so consider abridged or training modules that target staff needs in specific areas, such as community assessments or evaluation.

Mobilize Agency Support and Buy-In. States describe varying levels of leadership and staff support. While leadership and staff members typically support evidence-based decisionmaking, some states lack a framework for integrating evidence-based practices. In addition, there may be a perception that implementation takes time away from other required tasks.

- Communicate current initiatives and publicize activities and accomplishments.
- Identify opportunities to collaborate within and outside the agency.
- Report outcomes to staff and leadership.

Demonstrate how evidence-based processes strengthen public health decisionmaking—for example, through enhanced data collection or reallocation of resources to address community needs.

Partner for Results. Partnerships leverage the state role and resources with individuals and organizations that contribute different skill sets and resources. They may also enhance access to new stakeholders, such as policymakers, healthcare providers, and community-based organizations.

- Identify potential partners at the local, state, and national level that can help to achieve specific goals and address unmet needs. As described in the case studies and action sheets in this toolkit, successful collaborations can involve partners from community-based organizations, academic institutions, private firms, federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations.
- Develop a strategy for building and maintaining relationships.
- Identify clear goals and track progress towards achieving them. Tracking milestones, celebrating successes, and improving quality are important elements of successful partnerships.

Conduct (or Revisit) a Needs Assessment or Strategic Plan to Identify Unmet Workforce and Public Health Needs. As the first step in the EBPH process, community assessments help to identify interventions that respond to the community's needs and preferences. The needs assessment process is an essential precursor to program development: The process convenes stakeholders, gathers baseline data, and assesses the capacity of the health agency to implement evidence-based policies.

- Identify current needs assessment and planning resources, including community health needs assessments and health improvement planning resources.
- Learn from other state plans. Many states have a common framework—a state health improvement plan or needs assessment—that identifies community needs and helps to inform decisions about funding and programming. For example, the Connecticut Department of Public Health's [Guide and Template for Comprehensive Health Improvement Planning](#) outlines the planning process from convening the group to evaluating the plan and articulates that evidence is a criterion for setting health improvement priorities.

Other needs assessment resources are available online. For example, the Prevention Research Center in St. Louis provides slides for its [community assessment](#) module on its website. In addition, the Public Health Institute's "[Best Practices for Community Health Needs Assessment and Implementation Strategy Development](#)" provides tools for collecting data, engaging the community, setting priorities, and executing strategies.

Adopt the EBPH Framework. States may elect to apply the seven-step EBPH framework to one evidence-based strategy, or they may want to expand EBPH practices.

- States can seek training opportunities (e.g., a state team workshop or EBPH training workshop) to work through the steps of the EBPH framework. The National Network of Public Health Institutes, ASTHO, the Prevention Research Center in St. Louis, public health institutes, and other organizations offer training and planning resources.
- States may also use available resources, including other state stories and online training modules, to implement an evidence-based approach. Select resources include:
 - The [ASTHO/NNPHI Community Guide Workshop Resources](#) webpage contains links to evidence-based resources, action plans for states, worksheets, and checklists for comparing strategies and selecting appropriate strategies, as well as presentations aimed at helping states operationalize The Community Guide.
 - ASTHO state case studies included in this toolkit highlight state strategies and offer action steps and lessons learned. These stories can provide a starting point for states that want to adopt a similar initiative.
 - State toolkits and handbooks can offer step-by-step strategies and tools for adopting an EBPH approach (see Supplemental Resources section of the toolkit).

[“Tools for Implementing an Evidence-Based Approach in Public Health Practice”](#) provides tools and steps for conducting assessments, using data and information systems, making evidence-based decisions, conducting evaluations, and disseminating lessons learned.

Address Sustainability. Sustaining momentum and maintaining partner engagement can be a challenge for unfunded initiatives.

- Ensuring that evidence-based decisionmaking outlives a specific team project or initiative can be achieved by integrating evidence-based practices into state health planning frameworks. For example, the New York prevention agenda integrates the evidence-based framework into state-level planning and programming.
- Achieve early wins and communicate results to maintain stakeholder support.
- Use smaller projects as a springboard for other evidence-based collaborations.