Iowa’s Healthy People Plan Engages Partners Across the State to Address Critical Health Needs

The Iowa Department of Health used Healthy People 2020 resources and objectives to design a state health plan that facilitates engagement across organizations and agencies to address the state’s most urgent health needs.

The Healthy People initiative has provided 10-year national objectives to improve America’s health since 1990. The current initiative, Healthy People 2020, contains 1,200 objectives, which are divided into 42 public health topic areas. The objectives are designed to address the United States’ most pressing health concerns by increasing awareness and understanding of the determinants of health, disease, and disability, and opportunities for progress. Healthy People promotes community-sector collaboration, empowers individuals to make informed health decisions, and helps evaluate prevention activities.

States can incorporate Healthy People 2020 resources to address health challenges in a number of ways: for example, many states are using Healthy People as a guide to develop their own 10-year state plans by using the Healthy People national SMART objectives as a reference or benchmark for their own. The Healthy People 2020 website offers many resources to assist with state plan development, including:

- An evidence-based resource database for specific demographic groups.
- The MAP-IT Guide for assembling partners, identifying community needs, executing a plan, and evaluating progress.
- The Healthy People in Action database of state healthy people plans and success stories.

The Iowa Department of Health (IDPH) has successfully demonstrated how states can use the above Healthy People resources to develop their own state-specific plan.

**Steps Taken:**

When creating its state plan, “Healthy Iowans,” IDPH placed a strong emphasis on local involvement. IDPH used the Community Health Needs Assessment and Health Improvement Plan (CHNA & HIP) process to collect local input from Iowa’s 99 counties, and recognized that the MAP-IT framework would be a helpful resource for implementing and measuring progress. This framework facilitates the Mobilization of partners, Assessment of need, Planning of health interventions, Implementation of health interventions, and Tracking progress over time to achieve Healthy People objectives. IDPH fostered the development of county-level local planning committees, including local boards of health and local public health agencies (e.g., substance abuse, gambling, and mental health providers) alongside hospital and clinic health providers, community-based organizations, the media, emergency management services, the judicial system, and law enforcement to conduct health needs assessments, identify health priorities, and develop an improvement plan.

The 2013-2014 Healthy Iowans Progress Report revealed stakeholder progress in achieving state health objectives:

- 54 percent of respondents made progress in taking action.
- 17 percent completed an action.
- 19 percent were making some progress, but were behind schedule.
- 11 percent reported no progress.
Next, IDPH reviewed the county community health assessments and analyzed statewide and national data, including births and deaths from Vital Statistics, behavioral health data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Healthy People 2020 and the Healthy People Leading Health Indicators (LHIs), the National Prevention Strategy, and others. IDPH compared statewide and national data, health priorities in the CHNAs, and input from partners to identify 39 critical health needs. IDPH then enlisted more than 70 private and public organizations to identify objectives for addressing the critical health needs, including:

- 500 members of advisory committees.
- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.
- Iowa Department of Corrections.
- Iowa Department of Education.
- Iowa Department of Human Services.
- Iowa Department of Transportation.
- Iowa Department of Aging.
- Iowa Economic Development Authority.
- Iowa Office of Drug Policy.
- Iowa National Guard.
- State Hygienic Laboratory.
- Iowa State University Extension Service.
- Non-profit associations.
- Universities.
- Professional associations.

Department advisory committee facilitators received SMART objective training so that the committees could use Healthy People 2020 SMART objectives as a point of reference when crafting the state objectives.

Ultimately, IDPH divided the 39 critical health needs into nine topic areas (access to quality health services and support, acute disease, addictive behaviors, chronic disease, environmental health, healthy living, injury and violence, mental health and mental disorders, and preparedness and response), and created an annual evaluation plan. Each of the topic areas is comprised of two sections: one that measures progress toward meeting the objectives (illustrating baseline data, the date of the baseline measurement, the data source, and a target) and another that outlines the responsible organizations’ action steps. Each year, organizations and agencies report their progress, which is then listed in the Healthy Iowans report.

**Results:**

- Healthy Iowans contains 39 critical health needs divided into nine topic areas: access to quality health services and support, acute disease, addictive behaviors, chronic disease, environmental health, healthy living, injury and violence, mental health and mental disorders, and preparedness and response.
- The Healthy Iowans Plan addresses 18 of the applicable 26 Healthy People 2020 LHIs.
State Story

• The 2014 Healthy Iowans Progress Report illustrates the progress Iowa has made in implementing their state plan and also an assessment of progress from the partners who contributed to the development of the plan.
  o When asked to assess the 2013-2014 progress in achieving the objective/strategy, 71 percent of respondents said that they were making progress in taking action (54%) or had completed taking the action (17%). Nineteen percent reported that they were making some progress, but were behind schedule; nearly 11 percent reported no progress.
  o When asked to identify the most valuable element of the Healthy Iowans plan, 60 percent of agency respondents chose coordinating efforts with other groups, 36 percent chose facilitation in preparing grants or other funding requests, 29 percent chose the links to other planning documents, 20 percent chose guiding policy development, and 13 percent identified other benefits of the plan.

• Significant advances and barriers to improve public health in each of the nine topic areas are documented in the 2014 Healthy Iowans Progress Report.

Lessons Learned:

• IDPH decided not to “re-invent the wheel,” and so built on existing resources from organizations and agencies across sectors to develop the Healthy Iowans plan.

• When IDPH began work on the state component of Healthy People in the 1990s, it initially planned a 10-year period with a five-year revision. However, it was difficult to maintain the plan’s relevance while keeping partners engaged, so IDPH developed a five-year plan and conducts yearly evaluations that identify the lead organizations and their progress toward their objectives. In the evaluation report, the lead organizations are identified and their progress toward meeting outlined objectives is described. This keeps partners engaged because they must report their progress yearly.

• In the past, it has been difficult for partners to write SMART objectives; therefore, it is essential to provide ongoing assistance for all contributing organizations.

• Involving a multitude of partners has permitted health needs to be addressed across sectors and has contributed largely to the success of Healthy Iowans.

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