

WDPH Education and Training Advisory Committee (EdTRAC)

Background and Purpose

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The Wisconsin Public Health System is a partnership between local communities, statewide organizations and the governmental public health agencies. The State Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) organizes its statewide resources into a central office at the Wisconsin Division of Public Health (WDPH) with five regional offices. There are 94 Local Health Departments and 11 Tribal Health Departments. Twelve Consortia regions were created to assist Local Health Departments in their preparedness efforts. Each consortium serves a multi-county area with one Local Health Department from the area serving as the fiscal agent.

Finding adequate funds for ongoing training needs is a challenge. Most funding for local health departments is in the form of federal categorical programs, with very little state funding. Discretionary funds are very limited, and health departments compete for funding with other county services at the county board level.

Not only do we face an immediate need to continue to improve training in preparedness for public health emergencies, as a part of national security and preparedness efforts, but we also must address the long-term challenge of training the next generation of the public health workforce. According to a recent study **41%** of public health professionals in Wisconsin are likely to retire within the next five years (ASTHO and Council of State Governments report, *State Public Health Worker Shortage Report: A Civil Service Recruitment and Retention Crisis*). Under these circumstances, designing an efficient system for the education, training and continuing education of public health staff that takes advantage of the state's many academic resources, including the UW System, private university and college programs, the Wisconsin Technical College System and the Cooperative Extension, is essential.

Developing a "Sufficient and Competent Workforce" for public health is System Priority #4 in the State's Health Plan, *Healthiest Wisconsin 2010*. The plan specifies that

- Institutions of higher education and technical colleges must develop curricula that include a focus on the public health system and statewide health priorities and that address the core public health competencies appropriate for the health professional's level of function.
- Institutions of higher education, technical colleges, governmental public health agencies, and public and private organizations must partner to provide continuing education opportunities and ongoing skill development education and training for public health professionals and community workers. This must include content in the contemporary practice of public health, and data-based and system-based practice interventions at the individual, family, and community levels.

While there has been some progress toward achieving these *Healthiest Wisconsin 2010* goals in the last five years, particularly with the creation of the Wisconsin Public Health & Health Policy Institute along with emergency preparedness training activity, we still lack a forum for bringing together the many partners needed to develop a statewide, sustainable program that will address the many levels of training needed to prepare the broad range of professions that make up the public health workforce.

Purpose of the WDPH Education and Training Advisory Committee

The WDPH Education and Training Advisory Committee (EdTRAC) has been formed with two principal objectives:

- (1) to contribute to the State Health Plan system priority objective to "create an Education and Practice Forum to assure a competent public health workforce through a collaborative information and education network for workforce preparation, support of current practice, and continuing education", and
- (2) to systematically approach the multidisciplinary training and education needs of our public health system partners relative to emergency readiness.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health has contracted with the Wisconsin AHEC Program Office to coordinate EdTRAC meetings and EdTRAC work group activity. The AHEC Office has hired a staff person (April 2005) responsible for overall EdTRAC coordination and management.

EdTRAC will solicit statewide representation to include members of local public health, associations of health professionals, academic institutions, governmental agencies and others with a role in preparing the public health workforce to deliver essential public health and public health preparedness services. A major goal in selection of committee members will be to bring together individuals who can provide direction and guidance for training and education activities. Please see the EdTRAC organization chart (attached) for a list of organizational members.

EdTRAC will convene beginning in July 2005 and will continue to meet quarterly thereafter. The strategic goals identified for EdTRAC will be accomplished through the formation of focused work teams assigned to priority areas of training need. The full committee will be responsible for reviewing the progress of all work teams and for providing progress reports and recommendations to the WDPH.

A first priority will be to review and discuss the recent Wisconsin Public Health Workforce Needs Assessment along with other relevant workforce competency and capacity assessments completed in the last two years. The committee will provide input and ongoing feedback to the Wisconsin Division of Public Health addressing public health preparedness and practice education and training issues. The committee will review results of the training needs assessment data to develop a strategy to address the training gaps specific to each professional discipline, and to provide recommendations on best methods to deliver training to each group of system partners. An overarching goal of the committee will be to harness the combined efforts of academic programs to address specific areas of critical need identified through these assessments.

EdTRAC will work to assist WDPH and AHEC with the development of a central web-based catalog of public health continuing education opportunities for the full range of public health professionals. This website will link to the DPH-supported public health learning management system (Wisconsin *TrainingFinder Real-time Affiliate Integrated Network*, or WI-TRAIN), and will link to continuing education offerings by health professions programs in Wisconsin and nationwide.

Proposal for funding of continuing education through the HRSA-BTCDDP program

Within the context of its mission to address the breadth of education and training needs of the public health workforce, EdTRAC will be especially concerned with preparedness training. A statewide proposal for federal funding of emergency preparedness continuing education activities was submitted to the HRSA-BTCDDP program on May 19, 2005. The proposal was developed by the Wisconsin AHEC Program at the request of the Division of Public Health, in collaboration with the La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium and a number of potential project partners, including the UW Dept. of Family Practice, Wisconsin Office of Rural Health, Wisconsin Technical College System, Chippewa Valley Technical College, Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association, the UW School of Veterinary Medicine, the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene, Academic ADL Co-Lab and several groups with a concern in Emergency Services personnel training.

The proposal is not restricted to bioterrorism preparedness activities, but focuses as broadly as possible, within the constraints of the BTCDDP program purpose, on general preparedness training for all public health emergencies. It proposes projects to address the training needs of four groups essential to effective response in the event of a public health emergency, whether due to natural or accidental causes, or to acts of terrorism: (a) medical care providers, particularly those in the primary care setting, (b) community emergency response teams, (c) the local governmental public health infrastructure, and (d) non-governmental public health: the network of local agencies and volunteers concerned with community health. The proposal gives special attention to meeting the training needs of rural providers, clinics, health agencies and emergency responders; and to incorporating into all training an awareness of cultural barriers and limitations of special populations that may pose difficulties for effective communication and response. Where new curriculum design is necessary, emphasis is placed on asynchronous distance delivery, innovative web-based design where appropriate, inclusion of best practices from other sources, and potential for national applicability.

The funding period for this program is three years. If approved and funded, the first project year would be September 1, 2005 – August 31, 2006. Renewal for two additional years, through August 31, 2008, would depend upon funds available through the federal budget process each year.

Role of EdTRAC in Management of Activities Described in the BTCDP proposal

The proposal includes a central role for EdTRAC to provide the strategic leadership, direction, coordination and assessment of all preparedness training and education project activity associated with the grant. Working closely with the Grant Management Team, EdTRAC will assure that a collaborative and coordinated systematic approach to address critical training needs of Wisconsin's Public Health workforce for emergency preparedness are efficiently and effectively accomplished.

Coordination of all grant activities through EdTRAC will assure that we take advantage of curricular resources already in place and provide a means for coordination and evaluation across institutions and disciplines. EdTRAC involvement will also assure that all programs developed and implemented include core competencies in public health, take advantage of the public health network of training coordinators established through the CDC grant, and fully utilize the excellent local training facilities available through the UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System, both for lab activities and development and delivery of distance education.

