

Public Health Accreditation

Frequently Asked Questions



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Harford County
Health Department**

Q: What is public health accreditation and what is the value that accreditation can bring to a public health department?

Public health accreditation is the measurement of a health department's performance against a nationally recognized set of practice-focused, evidence-based standards. The national public health accreditation program administered by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#) has been developed on the principles of quality improvement. Accreditation is a means by which health departments can demonstrate their interest in being transparent and accountable in their operations.

Q: In 2011, the Public Health Accreditation Board launched the first national accreditation program for public health departments. What are the benefits of a national standard vs. local or regional standards?

Health departments who are using the accreditation standards and measures have told us that it has been very helpful to have national consensus about what a health department's role is. Even though we have had the [10 Essential Public Health Services](#) framework and the three core functions (assessment, policy development and assurance) of public health for a while, health departments tell us that having accreditation standards puts it all together for them in such a way that they have a good roadmap to guide their work.

Q: How does accreditation empower public health agencies to continually improve the efficiency and quality of their services?

First, it helps health departments to measure themselves against standards that other health departments are also using. Second, there is a peer review component to the accreditation process. So, health departments can have access to experts in their field — people who do what they do every day, but might see it through a different lens. Finally, PHAB will be working with the accredited health departments on areas that are identified for quality improvement to keep the momentum going and to help health departments continue to assess their progress and celebrate their accomplishments.

Q: How can accreditation help health departments survive, or even thrive, in a time of tight budgets and declining funds?

In many communities, the health department is almost invisible to the public. That "out of sight, out of mind" image has, for some, created opportunities for funding cuts that create great difficulties for the health department. Accreditation as a process has been shown to help other industries define who they are and then to involve their communities of interest in assessing their work. It has also been shown to help entities set priorities and focus on the most significant parts of their industry. PHAB has already heard of health departments who are preparing for accreditation who have used this window of opportunity to do the same for public health. And, then, once a health department is accredited, who is going to actively participate in reducing resources that might jeopardize that accreditation status?