

Local public health capacity development: A toolkit for tribal environmental public health programs

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PRESENTATION FORMAT: Oral Presentation

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Public health professionals - particularly environmental health - working with underrepresented/underserved/minority populations, especially Tribes

ABSTRACT: Tribal communities face many challenges related to environmental justice and health disparities. Yet, tribal health systems are underfunded and traditionally focus on patient-centered treatment services rather than preventive care and health promotion. This leads to a capability gap in providing the foundational public health services necessary for sustainable health improvements and equity.

Environmental public health is identified as a foundational public health program. In order to improve the services provided by the Indian Health Service (IHS) and to assist tribes in developing and implementing governmental environmental public health programs, the IHS has developed a "toolkit". The toolkit includes governance and administration resources, management and practice sample documents, as well as a training curriculum and a facilitator's guide.

A baseline assessment and gap analysis will be conducted for interested tribes, and then IHS will collaborate with each tribe to employ or obtain the tools needed to fill gaps and implement the program. A range of evaluation approaches will be necessary to establish whether capacity building does in fact occur.

In conclusion, if oversight and funding bodies are serious about local capacity building, there are steps that can be taken to move beyond rhetoric. Capacity building should be specified as a target in funding agreements or health department budgets and agreements should specify what steps are being taken to facilitate capacity building.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe the current status of environmental public health systems in tribal communities.

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