

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Sharing Public Health Services visited the Shared Services Learning Community site in Northeast Ohio on Dec. 2–4, 2013. This *Site Visit Report* documents the activities from the site visit as well as some of the Center’s observations. The report reflects the Center for Sharing Public Health Services team observations at the time of the site visit.

The report includes a lengthy *Background* section for those not familiar with the partnership. For those familiar with the partnership, go directly to the *Observations* section, which starts on page 3.

BACKGROUND

About the Center

The Center for Sharing Public Health Services helps communities learn how to work across jurisdictional boundaries to deliver essential public health services. The Center serves as a national resource on cross-jurisdictional sharing (CJS), building the evidence and producing and disseminating tools, methods and models to assist public health agencies and policymakers as they consider and adopt CJS approaches.

Building Evidence: One way the Center builds evidence is by working closely with a Shared Services Learning Community (SSLC), made up of demonstration projects in several states that encompass a diverse spectrum of CJS initiatives, from small-scale initiatives to full consolidation of health departments. The Center provides technical assistance and a forum that allows these communities to share lessons learned with each other and the Center. In return, the SSLC acts as a learning laboratory by providing real world experiences that the Center collects and analyzes and shares with the nation.

Producing and disseminating tools, methods and models: The experiences of the SSLC, along with other research and expert opinions, provide the knowledge and insight the Center needs to provide tools and assistance to any community or group of communities considering CJS arrangements.

The Center for Sharing Public Health Services is a national initiative managed by the Kansas Health Institute with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

About Northeast Ohio

Portage County covers approximately 500 square miles and has a population of 161,451. It is suburban and rural, and is located near Akron and Cleveland. In Portage County, 14.3 percent of the population lives below the federal poverty level. Kent and Ravenna are two cities within Portage County. They are about five miles apart. Kent is the larger of the two, with 29,807 people (and this population level increases substantially when the Kent State University campus is fully populated during the school year). In Kent, which is the home of Kent State University, 35.3 percent of the population lives below the federal poverty level. Ravenna is the county seat and has a population of 11,570. In Ravenna, 21.8

percent of the population lives below the federal poverty level. The area is covered by three local health departments, one in Kent, one in Ravenna, and the county health department, which covers the rest of the area.

About the Northeast Ohio Project

A state statute was recently passed in Ohio that gives the Director of the Ohio Department of Health the authority to require that health jurisdictions become accredited, or face the prospect of losing state and federal funding support, by the year 2020. In Portage County, a regional task force for public health improvement has been studying the issues of accreditation and public health improvement since March 2011. In a report, they suggested the Portage County Health District, the Ravenna Health Department and the Kent Health Department pursue accreditation and public health improvements by working collaboratively with one another.

The project with the Center provided external support for the task force to continue its work. The Kent State University Foundation is acting as a convener and provides knowledge, best practices and staffing. The team, led by project director, John Hoornbeek, associate professor at Kent State University, is working with the task force to inventory and evaluate current CJS arrangements, analyze CJS models for their potential use, and develop a strategic action plan for implementing the preferred CJS model. The project team has convened three workgroups. The *Strategy and Action Plan* workgroup focuses on strategies for accreditation and public health improvement, the *Evaluation* workgroup focuses on inventorying current collaborative efforts and making recommendations regarding their improvement, and the *Education and Involvement* workgroup helps reach out to stakeholders in the community.

Two of the three workgroups rolled out recommendations during the site visit. By design, the *Education and Involvement* workgroup, which is responsible for communications, will base their recommendations on the findings of the other two groups. The health departments will consider the recommendations from all three workgroups and provide feedback in February.

Simultaneous to the efforts of the workgroups, there were and are discussions between the Ravenna Health Department and the Portage County Health District about consolidation. They have agreed to consolidate operations, but are still working out the details, so there is some flexibility to change direction.

SITE VISIT

Participants

The host team included:

- John Hoornbeek, Associate Professor at Kent State University (Project Director)
- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner, Portage County Health District
- Jeff Neistadt, Health Commissioner, Kent Health Department

- Kelly Engelhart, Interim Health Commissioner, Ravenna Health Department

Visitors from two other Shared Services Learning Community sites attended the site visit:

- Horizon Community Health Board Team — Minnesota
 - Sharon Braaten, Director, Pope County Health Department
 - Sandy Tubbs, Director, Douglas County Health Department and also Stevens Traverse Grant Public Health
 - Connie Bullock, Public Health Nurse, Stevens Traverse Grant Public Health
 - Betsy Hills, Public Health Nurse, Douglas County Public Health
 - Crystal Wagar, Public Health Nurse, Pope County Public Health
- Yellowstone and Carbon Counties Team — Montana
 - Doug Tucker, County Commissioner, Carbon County

Numerous other team members, task force members and other stakeholders also participated in the site visit at various times, including:

- **Monday, December 2nd**

7:00 pm – Dinner with Health Commissioners in downtown Kent , Ohio

- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner Portage County Combined Health District,
- Jeff Neistadt, Health Commissioner City of Kent Health Department
- Kelly Engelhart, Interim Health Commissioner City of Ravenna Health Department
- Aimee Budnik, Doctoral Candidate at College of Public Health, Kent State University

- **Tuesday, December 3rd**

8:00 a.m. - Breakfast with Kent State University faculty and leadership

- Dr. John A. Hoornbeek, faculty at College of Public Health
- Dr. Jonathan VanGeest, faculty at College of Public Health
- Ken Slenkovich, faculty and Assistant Dean at College of Public Health

9:00 a.m. - Introductory Meeting at Kent State University College of Public Health

- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner Portage County Combined Health District,
- Jeff Neistadt, Health Commissioner City of Kent Health Department
- Kelly Engelhart, Interim Health Commissioner City of Ravenna Health Department
- Matt Stefanak, Ex. Health Commissioner of Mahoning County Health Department
- Ken Slenkovich, faculty and Assistant Dean at College of Public Health
- Dan Derreberry, Township Trustee Atwater

- Dr. John A. Hoornbeek, faculty at College of Public Health
- Nishikant Kamble, Student College of Public Health

10:00 a.m. - Meeting with Health commissioners at Kent State University College of Public Health

- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner Portage County Combined Health District,
- Jeff Neistadt, Health Commissioner City of Kent Health Department
- Kelly Engelhart, Interim Health Commissioner City of Ravenna Health Department
- Matt Stefanak, Ex. Health Commissioner of Mahoning County Health Department
- Ken Slenkovich, faculty at College of Public Health
- Dan Derreberry, Township Trustee Atwater
- Dr. John A. Hoornbeek, faculty at College of Public Health
- Nishikant Kamble, Student College of Public Health

11:00 a.m. - Meeting with available Kent city officials and with Kent Health Department

- Jeff Neistadt, Health Commissioner
- Doug Wagener, BoH Kent Health Department
- Christopher J. Woolverton, BoH Kent Health Department
- Dave Ruller, City Manager, Kent, Ohio
- John Hoornbeek, College of Public Health

12:15 p.m. - Working lunch with Governing Entity representatives

- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner Portage County Combined Health District,
- Robert Howard, President Board of Health
- Doug Wagener, BoH Kent Health Department
- Lucy Ribelin, Ravenna Health Department
- Chris Woolverton, BoH Kent Health Department
- Ralph Kletzian, Portage Foundation
- Matt Stefanak, Ex. Health Commissioner of Mahoning County Health Department
- Ken Slenkovich, faculty at College of Public Health
- Dan Derreberry, Township Trustee Atwater
- Dr. John A. Hoornbeek, faculty at College of Public Health
- Aimee Budnik, Doctoral Candidate at College of Public Health, Kent State University

- Nishikant Kamble, Student College of Public Health

1:45 p.m. - Visit May 4th Museum at Kent State University

- Tegan Beechey, Doctoral student at College of Public Health
- Site visitors from Kansas, Washington, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Montana

3.00 p.m. - Meeting with Portage County Health Department

- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner Portage County Combined Health District
- Robert Howard, Vice President Board of Health
- Rosemary Ferraro, Director, Nursing Services
- Karen Towne, PH Nursing Supervisor
- Becky Lehman, Health Education Director
- Lloyd Groves, Director, Environmental Health
- John Hoornbeek, College of Public Health

4:10 p.m. - Meeting with Ravenna elected officials at Ravenna City Hall

- Joseph Bica, Mayor, City of Ravenna
- Kelly Engelhart, Interim Health Commissioner City of Ravenna Health Department
- Lucy Ribelin, BoH Ravenna Health Department
- William McCluskey, BoH Ravenna Health Department
- Bruce Ribelin, at large representative, Ravenna City Council
- John Hoornbeek, College of Public Health

6:00 p.m. - Task Force Meeting over dinner at hotel

- DuWayne Porter, Health Commissioner Portage County Combined Health District,
- Jeff Neistadt, Health Commissioner City of Kent Health Department
- Kelly Engelhart, Interim Health Commissioner City of Ravenna Health Department
- Robert Howard, Vice-President BoH Portage Health Department
- Lucy Ribelin, Ravenna Health Department
- Ralph Kletzian, Portage Foundation
- Dan Derreberry, Township Trustee Atwater
- Dr. Heather Beaird, Summit County Public Health
- Joseph Bica, Mayor City of Ravenna
- Marchelle Bobbs, BoH Kent Health Department
- Amie Cajka, Director Mental Health Recovery Board

- Kris Drummond, CEO Axesspointe Community Health Center
 - Rose Ferraro, Director of Nursing Services, Portage County
 - Pamela Freeman, BoH Kent Health Department
 - Loyd Groves, Director Environmental Health, Portage
 - Mindy Gusz, Robinson Memorial Hospitals/ Health systems
 - Jim Hammer, Freedom Township Trustee
 - Karen Kichton, College of Public Health
 - Dr. Amy Lee, faculty Northeast Ohio Medical University
 - Becky Lehman, Health Education Director, Portage Health Department
 - William McCluskey, Ravenna Health Department, BoH
 - Iris Meltzer, Kent Environmental Council
 - Joel Mowrey, Executive Director Mental Health and Recovery Board
 - Robert Palmer, President, Portage County BoH
 - Annette Petranic, Pavlick Consulting Agency
 - Bradley Raum, VP Business Development. Robinson Health Systems
 - Justin Smith, Environmental division Kent Health Department
 - Karen Towne, Nursing Division, Portage Health Department
 - Doug Wagener, BoH Kent
 - Dr. Christopher Woolverton, BoH Kent
 - John Gwinn, BoH Kent
 - Dr. Sonia Alemagno, Dean of the College of Public Health, Kent State University
 - Dr. John A. Hoornbeek, Director, Center for Public Policy and Health, Kent State University
 - Aimee Budnik, Doctoral Candidate at College of Public Health, Kent State University
 - Nishikant Kamble, Student College of Public Health
- **Wednesday December 4, 2014**
 - 9:00 a.m. - Meeting with Summit County Public Health officials
 - Gene Nixon, Health Commissioner, Summit County Public Health
 - Donna Skoda, Deputy Health Commissioner, Summit County Public Health
 - Dr. John Hoornbeek, Director, Center for Public Policy and Health
 - Other members of the SCPH leadership and staff

Three representatives from the Center for Sharing Public Health Services facilitated the site visit:

- Patrick M. Libbey, Center Co-Director.
- Gianfranco Pezzino, Center Co-Director.
- Grace Gorenflo, Senior Project Consultant.

Site Visit Activities

Visitors arrived at the Akron Canton Airport on the evening of Monday, Dec. 2, and had dinner with the health commissioners from the three jurisdictions and a representative from Kent State University College of Public Health. The following morning, they met with the entire team from Kent State and the health commissioners to get an overview of the structure, governance, and financing of Public Health in Ohio and an overview of project work to date. That was followed by a meeting with Kent city officials and health department staff. In the afternoon, they met with Portage County Health Division staff and a representative from the Portage County Board of Health, then with elected officials and health officials from the city of Ravenna. In the evening, they attended a dinner meeting of the Task Force for Improving Public Health in Portage County. The following day, they went to a neighboring jurisdiction, Summit County Public Health Department, to learn from health department leadership and staff about their recent consolidation. The Akron City Health Department and Summit County Health Department were both a part of large health districts and they faced somewhat different challenges than the challenges now being addressed in Portage County.

OBSERVATIONS

Site visits provide a valuable learning opportunity, both for the Center staff and for the participants. There is only so much information the Center can gather from reports or phone calls. Meeting with people in their actual environment completes the picture and contributes to a better understanding of the project.

Some observations gleaned by the Center as a result of participating in the site visit are listed below.

There is a general sense of individual identity, as opposed to a regional identity.

A strong regional identity is beneficial in CJS arrangements because, among other things, it helps to build trust.

Kent's strong sense of individual identity was quite striking. This stood in contrast to Ravenna, the county seat, and the Portage County Health Department. While some collaboration exists, both with public health and with other public services, there is no prevailing sense of a regional identity.

The jurisdictions have different individual motivations for being involved in a CJS arrangement.

The individual jurisdictions' respective motivations or drivers are described below.

The Ravenna Health Department is a small entity and, as such, doesn't have as many resources as the other two partners. The stakeholders in Ravenna view consolidation as a way to begin providing essential public health services that they cannot provide on their own.

The Kent Health Department thinks that a joint community health assessment (CHA) and community health improvement plan (CHIP) could be beneficial and could serve to identify specific areas of potential collaboration.

Portage County Health District offers some services the individual cities don't provide. Stakeholders with the county seem to view the partnership as a way to ensure a robust system of essential public health services throughout the county.

This project has helped to inform policymakers about public health.

The ongoing work of the task force has raised awareness of public health issues among policymakers and stakeholders. It has also helped policymakers agree that public health is a core function of local government, and one that needs to be sustained financially.

LESSONS LEARNED

As a result of participating in this site visit, the Center staff came away with several insights that could be useful in this project and when working with other jurisdictions considering sharing arrangements.

It is important to clarify the "why" of new CJS arrangements.

The site visit seemed to provide a timely opportunity for the team lead and health officials to take stock of progress to date and the decisions at hand. Given the different drivers of each, the team would be well-served by clearly articulating their individual and shared goals, and revisiting these goals as needed as they consider the workgroups' recommendations.

A third party team lead could benefit by meeting with all jurisdictions individually, in addition to meeting as a group.

As team lead, Kent State has provided staffing, knowledge and best practices for this effort, and as the project manager has maintained a certain level of momentum. The vast majority of work is completed by workgroups populated with key stakeholders and individuals who have the appropriate expertise. Moreover, the work is being completed according to an established timeline.

In addition to ensuring that the work plan is proceeding according to schedule, it is critical for the team lead to also check in with the health officials and other key stakeholders to ensure that their "drivers" are being reinforced and any particular concerns they have are being addressed. If this is not happening, it would be important to revisit and clarify the "why" with all stakeholders and potentially make some mid-course corrections. Ultimately, including one-on-one check-ins in the work plan could help facilitate the progress of the effort.

Successful transitions entail a great deal of “care and feeding.”

The meeting with Summit County Combined Health District leadership and staff was extremely informative. It quickly became abundantly clear that regardless of how carefully leadership prepares for a transition to an integrated health department, a great deal of additional time and effort are required to help all staff acclimate and assure that all operations — both back office and program-specific — function smoothly.

**SELECTED COMMENTS AND QUOTES FROM THE SITE VISIT AND FOLLOW-UP
EVALUATIONS**

Shortly after the visit, the Center sent out an electronic evaluation. The comments below came from the site team and the site visitors via the evaluations.

“I would say that we had two main learnings:

- *First, because of the site visit, we learned more about our own situation because the systematic effort made to share information with the visitors enabled us to learn in a more organized and systematic fashion the views and perspectives of our own project team — which communicates frequently, but rarely in this kind of systematic way.*
- *And second, we learned from the perspectives shared by our site visitors, as they brought new big picture insights to our understanding of our own situation, while also enabling us to learn from their experiences.”*

“I learned new ways to frame and describe the “whys” of considering cross-jurisdictional sharing.”

I learned how differently our governing boards operate from state to state and yet issues about merging/consolidating are so similar. I learned about the process that each agency is going through as they prepare for possible merging. I also was able to take away valuable information from the Summit County site visit to bring back to our employees that will be reassuring and comparable to feelings and concerns they have.”

“It was very beneficial to visit with peers at Summit County and hear real comments about how the transition took place.”

“As a result of participating in this site visit we will be looking at modifying our presentation to the elected officials.”

“I think we are very aware of the importance of communication and marketing to promote the efforts that are being made in our project.”

“It takes time to plan the visit and orchestrate the logistics, but it is worth it — everyone benefits!”