

A Perspective on the Missouri Voluntary Accreditation Program for Local Public Health Agencies for the **Governing Body**



Accreditation is a credential given to an agency or institution upon meeting a certain set of standards. For institutions, such as hospitals, schools, and universities, accreditation standards are well established. Throughout the healthcare industry, providers are licensed or accredited. This has not been the custom for local governmental public health agencies. These agencies, which have been the invisible protectors of population health, now may become distinctive, credible counterparts in the community healthcare system.

The Standards for the Missouri Voluntary Accreditation Program (MOVAP) define the critical elements that every person, regardless of where they live, should reasonably expect their local public health agency (LPHA) to fulfill. For members of a governing body, the MOVAP standards can be a valuable tool in governing and guiding your LPHA. While the standards provide a framework by which LPHAs are accountable to the public and governing bodies to which they report, the implementation of the standards may be tailored to allow for varied characteristics of LPHAs such as structure, capacity, governance, staffing patterns, and size of population served. These standards serve as a valuable tool in identifying areas for improvement, strengthening local partnerships and assuring that a strong system is in place for efficient and effective response to day-to-day public health issues as well as public health emergencies. Here are a few important questions based on the standards that governing bodies might consider.

1. How does your LPHA monitor health status, analyze data to identify trends, health problems, environmental health hazards and social and economic conditions that adversely affect the public's health?
2. How does your LPHA protect people from health problems and health issues, how do they prevent, minimize, and contain adverse health events and conditions resulting from communicable disease, food, water, and vector-borne outbreaks, chronic diseases; environmental hazards; and injuries?
3. Does your agency exchange information and data with individuals, community groups, the media, and the public about physical, behavioral, environmental, social, economic, and other issues affecting the public's health?
4. Is there an effective process in place to engage the community to identify, prioritize and solve health problems; establish public health goals; and evaluate success in meeting the goals?
5. How does your LPHA develop public health policies and plans to improve physical, behavioral, environmental, social, and economic conditions in the community that affect the public's health?
6. Is there an effective process in place to create, review and or update existing laws, ordinances, and regulations that protect the public's health?
7. How does your agency work with its partners to identify and address gaps in health care services and delivery in your community?
8. How does your agency evaluate LPHA staff members' public health competencies, and address deficiencies through continuing education, training, and leadership development activities?
9. Does your organization have a systematic process in place to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of all LPHA programs and activities and use the information to improve LPHA performance and community health outcomes?
10. Does your LPHA have a process in place to identify and apply cost effective, evidence-based programs and services?

Can you and/or your organization's senior leaders answer these questions?

If not, your organization may have gaps that could require leadership's attention.

How do the Missouri Voluntary Accreditation Program standards help governing bodies?

The Standards help local policy makers make better and more effective policy and resource decisions to improve the community's health. The Standards answer questions such as, "What are the components, activities, competencies, and capacities of our health department" and "How well are the Foundational Public Health Services being provided in our system?" The dialogue that occurs in answering these questions helps identify strengths and weaknesses within the system and/or governing entity. This information can then be used to improve and better coordinate public health activities in the community system.

Additionally, the Standards can also help leadership monitor an LPHA's key results in areas such as health status monitoring, investigation, informing and educating the public, mobilizing community partnerships, policy development, linking people to care, workforce development, and program evaluation.

What are the benefits of using the Standards?

The Missouri Voluntary Accreditation Program assessment process is successful in increasing organizational quality because of its extensive application process. The application process does the following:

- **Motivates Staff:** The accreditation process involves and motivates people by inviting staff to think about what they do individually and as part of a group, department and agency to meet the community's health needs.
- **Provides a Quality System:** The standards have been designed and are continuously improved by leading public health, business and quality experts. They provide LPLHAs with standards and effective processes to assess their strengths and weaknesses and plan future improvement initiatives.
- **Stimulates Change:** Problem-solving techniques are used to improve quality, based on the results of the application process.
- **Builds Financial Success:** It can improve financial performance by increasing business, establishing an image as a quality healthcare provider and leader, and reducing the cost of poor quality.

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