



Creating a Vision for a Healthier Montana: Introducing the Strengthening Montana’s Public Health System Study Summary from Regional Roundtable Meetings

Background

As part of the “Strengthening Montana’s Public Health System Study,” the Montana Healthcare Foundation hosted regional roundtable meetings in: Helena, September 11, 2018; Billings, September 12, 2018 and Glendive, September 13, 2018. The objectives of these meetings were to:

- Listen to the vision for healthier communities in each region
- Provide information and education regarding public health institutes and gauge the level of need for and support for development of a public health institute in Montana
- Seek input into the possible roles a public health institute could serve in Montana

The meetings were facilitated by the consultant team to the project, Jane Smilie, MPH, Population Health Partners, LLC, Erin Marziale, MPH, Director of Network Engagement, National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) and Vincent LaFronza, Ed.D., MS, President and CEO, NNPHI. All meetings were from 9 am to 12:30 pm. More than 135 individuals attended the meetings and were from a variety of health, human service, education, community-based and other organizations, and included elected officials, policymakers, community leaders and government officials from the local, county, state and federal levels. Health department leaders represented 22 Montana counties and representatives of several organizations serving tribal members also attended.

The agenda for the meetings included:

- Presentations with opportunities for questions
 - Overview of the Feasibility Study
 - The State of Montana’s Health
 - Current Functioning of the Public Health System
 - Exploring Public Health Institutes
- Two focused, facilitated conversations
 - Understanding the Community, Regional and State Context to Inform the Study, and
 - Exploring the Possibilities for Strengthening the Public Health System.

The focused conversations provided an opportunity for the consultant team to gather information and learn from participants about: health priorities in their communities; interest in, support for and concerns about a possible public health institute, as well as roles one could serve; and perceptions about the current functioning of the public health system and how it could be strengthened.

Themes from the Regional Roundtable Meetings

The consultant team transcribed the data collected at the three meetings, analyzed the data by location and then identified the themes from across locations as presented here. The data did not lend to ranking the themes in any way and they are not presented here in any specific order.

Focused Conversation #1: Understanding the Community, Regional and State Context to Inform the Study

Question 1: What data stood out to you from this presentation (the State of Montana's Health)?

- Behavioral health issues including substance use disorders and suicide
- Motor vehicle crashes and distracted driving
- Tobacco and e-cigarette use
- Immunization rates
- Health inequities and disparities among American Indians and rural residents
- Access issues

Question 2: You've heard a lot about priorities in the state, what are you most excited about or most interested in?

- Behavioral health
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma
- Social determinants of health
- Collaborations among multi-sector organizations

Question 3: What would you say lies underneath these priorities in this region or your community? What does the study need to know about in this region or in your community that isn't reflected on the state level?

- Social determinants of health
- Poverty
- A culture of independence
- Access issues, including geography, distance and transportation

Question 4: Are there other data you recommend we consider as part of the study? Other partners?

Data

- No particular themes emerged regarding specific data, however, there was general interest in having more local data available.

Partners

- Business/Chambers of Commerce
- Law enforcement
- Governing entities
- Providers of services for the aging and older persons
- Office of Public Instruction and schools

Note: some of these partners were represented at one or more meeting.

Focused Conversation #2: Exploring the Possibilities for Strengthening the Public Health System

Question 1: What are your reflections on the current public health system in Montana? What caught your attention about public health institutes (PHIs)?

Public Health System

- Lacks capacity and resources

Public Health Institutes

- Could serve as resource to many organizations and counties
- Support for policy work, including being a neutral organization
- Serving as a convener and providing support for collaboration, coordination, communication
- These are flexible organizations, unencumbered by government

Question 2: What were you excited about in the presentation on PHIs? What examples reminded you of existing organizations in Montana or partnerships?

Excited about

- PHIs providing funding to the local level through regranting
- PHIs serving in the role of convener

Reminded of

- Rural Health Initiative (MSU)
- Area Health Education Centers/Office of Rural Health
- Montana Healthcare Foundation
- Public health advocacy organizations

Question 3: Based on your experience serving the needs of people in your community, what do you think is needed to improve health and well-being?

- Funding, capacity, infrastructure
- Governance and policymakers that are better informed regarding public health
- Access to behavioral health services
- Workforce development
- Focus on social determinants of health, especially poverty, housing and transportation

Question 4: From what you've just heard about PHIs, could this model address some of the community, regional and state priorities we discussed earlier? What else do we need to consider?

Could address

- Could bring in funding, do grant writing
- Support for local health departments – administrative, grants management, backbone/back office functions
- Support for policy work and policy analysis
- Workforce development
- Could bring more focus to rural/frontier disparities, needs, data

What else/concerns

- Could compete for limited funds and/or duplicate efforts of others

- Could become urban focused and leave out rural/frontier areas
- Sustainability
- Lack of experience in our part of the country

Question 5: What action ideas has these presentations sparked for you?

- No clear themes emerged from this question.

Question 6: What didn't we ask that you wished we had? What else do you want to share?

- Would a PHI focus on rural/frontier areas?