



IOWA PUBLIC HEALTH TRACKING

PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION

Linn County Uses Local Health Data to Improve Health

In Linn County Public Health's (LCPH) strategic plan for 2012 to 2015, public health data management was identified as an area of needed improvement. Two strategies were identified to establish a comprehensive LCPH public health data management system, including development of a data repository and use of data to inform decision making. Actions toward completing these strategies included developing data sharing agreements with data owners or stewards, acquiring local data, and writing public health reports.

What was the Problem/Situation?

As the second most populous county in Iowa, LCPH wanted to be able to use GIS mapping to identify areas within Linn County that are adversely affected by certain health conditions. In order to accomplish this goal, LCPH needed to obtain data that would be specific enough to be used for GIS mapping. By establishing a comprehensive public health data management system, LCPH can use local data to drive decision making, quality improvement and accountability which results in better health for all of Linn County.

How was Iowa Public Health Tracking Involved?

LCPH contacted Iowa Public Health Tracking (IPHT) staff to gain access to local data. In 2013, a data sharing agreement between LCPH and the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) was finalized that allowed LCPH to access detailed health data for the county and provided access to the IPHT secure portal. IPHT staff provided technical assistance to LCPH to identify additional datasets housed at IDPH containing county level data that could be utilized at LCPH.

What Action was Taken to Solve the Problem/Situation?

In July 2014, Linn County Public Health released The Health of Linn County, Iowa: A county-wide assessment of health status and health risks. This report contains data available on the IPHT portal, as well as data obtained with the help of IPHT staff. The health profile is the first of its kind for Linn County, and will be used to inform the Community Health Needs Assessment process that will take place in the beginning of January 2015. Additionally, Linn County communities and policy makers can use the profile to determine where to begin to make Linn County a healthier community. LCPH will use data presented in the report during the 2014 strategic planning process. The strategic plan will influence the department's performance management system, quality improvement plan, and division work plans. The profile can be accessed by visiting: <http://www.linncounty.org/health> and clicking on the "Reports and Publications" link.

GIS maps created from datasets obtained through the data sharing agreement with IDPH are used to prioritize resources in areas of the county that need them the most. The GIS maps are also used to identify neighborhoods within the county who are experiencing health issues that had not previously been an issue for the location. One example of a map created to address health concerns is a map of STD cases per 1,000 population, by census tract (see image to the right). This map helped a local sexual health coalition identify neighborhoods that would benefit most from increased awareness of the increased STD rates. In addition, the coalition was able to target placement of condom dispensers in areas where the greatest need existed.

