

Executive Summary – PHP Capacity Survey, July 2009

On April 23, 2009 a request was e-mailed to all county health departments (CHD's) in Florida that receive Public Health Preparedness (PHP) funding asking them to complete the attached PHP Funded Epidemiology Capacity-CHD Progress Report and return it to the Bureau of Epidemiology by May 29, 2009. Due to the Novel H1N1 Influenza outbreak, the PHP Capacity Survey due date was extended to June 26, 2009. This report provides a summary of the PHP funded positions, as well as an overall perspective of the epidemiology capacity in the funded counties.

Thirty-four of Florida's sixty-seven counties (51%) receive PHP funding. There are 7/7 (100%), large counties 18/20 (90%) medium counties and 9/40 (23%) small counties that receive PHP funding. The funded counties account for over 90% (17,225,875) of the population of the state of Florida. Thirty-one out of the thirty-four PHP funded CHD's (91%) passed the Bureau of Epidemiology's measure that was included in the Office of Performance Improvement's County Performance Snapshot for 2008.

The PHP monies currently provide seventy-six employee positions in thirty-four counties to enhance epidemiology capacity within the health department system. These currently filled positions represent 92% of the 83 funded positions allocated for this grant. Six of the positions represent Florida Epidemic Intelligence Service Program fellows (EIS), although at the time of the survey, only 3/6 of these positions were filled. Twenty-nine of the funded counties (85%) have epidemiology employees who are members of an Epidemiology Strike-Team that is trained to assist during a natural or man-made disaster. There are at least 182 staff members in the PHP-funded counties that are trained on and regularly use the Merlin data surveillance system. Over 182 hospitals throughout the state have relationships with the PHP-funded CHD employees. Over 33,000 health care providers in the state can be contacted rapidly in an emergency by the PHP-funded county employees. At least 11 other CHD's that do not currently receive designated PHP funding are assisted by staff in counties that do receive PHP funding. This includes two CHD consortiums, one based in Bay CHD serving the mid-Panhandle region and another that was based in Baker CHD until June 2009, serving the Northeast Florida region. At the time of this survey, we were notified that this position had been relocated to Flagler County to better serve the needs of the consortia.

All counties are tested on their after-hours phone system to ensure that a provider can reach a knowledgeable staff member who can take a reportable disease report. Twenty of the thirty-four CHD's (59%) passed both the evening and weekend phone drills. Eleven of the CHD's (32%) passed one phone drill and failed the other. Only three of the PHP funded counties (9%) failed both evening and weekend phone drills.

Nearly all PHP-funded staff members have received epidemiology training and this funding has allowed them to cross-cover while other employees are out of the office.

Current PHP epidemiology capacity funding has been held level with no loss or increase in CHD positions anticipated for the 2009-2010 grant year. As some employees retire

there may be some possibility of a realignment of funding to benefit other counties in need of building epidemiology capacity.