

Telling Missouri's Public Health Stories



Public Health Accreditation an Important Step toward Excellence

In September 2018, months of hard work paid off for four of Missouri's local public health agencies as they received accreditation awards from the Missouri Institute for Community Health (MICH).

Local public health departments in Douglas, Polk, Madison and Ozark counties were recognized by MICH as having demonstrated they have the knowledge, skills and services to achieve improved health and safety outcomes in their communities, and have established a path to quality improvement.

Becky Hunt, administrator of the Madison County Health Department says their agency was previously accredited from 2015 – 2018. When MICH revised the standards and was looking to test them with BETA sites, Hunt accepted an offer from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services to cover part of the accreditation fee if Madison County would pursue reaccreditation. She says the financial assistance was a huge benefit for her department.



Administrator Rhonda Suter of the Ozark County Health Center

The accreditation journey in Douglas County began under the leadership of former administrator Sandy Puepcke. She says, "The process of accreditation was important in that it would help the staff understand what everyone's role was in the health department, thereby uniting them and being able to better serve the community."



Douglas County Health Department staff

Valerie Reese is the current administrator in Douglas County. She says it was important to her to maintain accreditation status in order to continue the good work Sandy and the staff started. She says the journey was difficult, but valuable.

"Going through the accreditation process has been challenging, but at the end of the day I would say well worth it. We have grown tremendously in our understanding of quality that then leads to an informed staff that can then provide better service to the community."

Michelle Morris, administrator of the Polk County Health Center agrees. “We sought accreditation for our agency because we want to strengthen the capacity of our organization and positively impact the communities we serve.”



Polk County Health Center staff with MICH Executive Director Dennis Diehl and Polk County Health Center Board members. Source: Bolivar Herald-Free Press

MICH Executive Director Dennis Diehl says this is exactly what MICH accreditation seeks to facilitate. “MICH accreditation focuses on developing strong leadership and workforce as well as community partnerships. Accreditation not only strengthens every aspect of what an LPHA does, but it promotes public awareness and respect in the community and improves the chances for increased funding opportunities.”

Promoting respect for public health and awareness of its reach and value is also one of the primary goals of the #HealthierMO grassroots initiative to transform the public health system in Missouri. The initiative seeks to create a stronger, more sustainable and culturally relevant public health system that can better meet the needs of Missouri’s diverse communities and offer every Missouri resident the opportunity for a healthier life.

“Accreditation fits perfectly into the goals and objectives of the TFPH [#HealthierMO] initiative to improve the public health system in Missouri and the resulting health and safety outcomes of its citizens,” says Diehl. “Accreditation defines public health practice through the development of standards and capabilities based on the Foundational Public Health Services model, creating a baseline for all local public health agencies.”

MICH worked with more than 70 public health system partners in Missouri to revise the accreditation standards in light of the Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) framework created by the Public Health Leadership Forum in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. This national FPHS model describes public health capabilities and services that must be available in every community to assure public health.



Ozark County Health Center staff Becky Robbins and Brenda Hambelton, RN review documents.

Diehl says achieving accreditation assures the public that “no matter where they live, their local public health department meets public health standards today and into the future.”

In Douglas County, Reese reports the accreditation process has better equipped her staff to more quickly identify areas of concern or gaps in service and then move to fill those gaps and offer needed services to the community.

Hunt explains the impact accreditation will offer her community. “The citizens of Madison County will be assured we are a quality public health provider for their public health needs.”

Morris elaborates on the benefits to Polk County. "We view obtaining MICH accreditation as another step toward excellence. Our staff is a group of dedicated individuals actively engaged in the process. It gives them a feeling of pride to work in an accredited agency."

Local boards of health in the four counties were also very supportive of accreditation.

Reese says, "The board has been very proactive and encouraging to the staff during the pursuit of accreditation. They are very informed and aware of the importance of what being accredited means for our agency."

Hunt says her Board of Directors is dedicated to maintaining the accreditation designation and issued a directive to encourage staff to meet expectations. She is confident her agency will remain diligent to meet each standard every year.

The administrators encourage their peers across Missouri to pursue accreditation, as well.

Hunt advises, "Plan ahead. Assure the Foundational Public Health Services are the framework of your pre-requisites, as this will be a vital component of your documentation throughout the seven standards sections."

Reese adds, "If you are considering accreditation for your agency, reach out to MICH and ask a lot of questions. They are there to help guide you through this process, so use their expertise!"

MICH has been the accrediting body for Missouri's Voluntary Accreditation Program since 2002. Their mission is to facilitate and promote excellence in local public health services and capabilities. Fourteen Missouri local public health agencies are currently accredited through MICH. To learn more about MICH accreditation, visit MICHweb.org.



Madison County Health Department staff

The #HealthierMO initiative is seeking more stories like this one that demonstrate how partners in Missouri's greater public health system are working together to transform the future of public health in our state and offer every resident the opportunity for a healthier life. If you have a story to share, message us on Facebook @[HealthierMO](https://www.facebook.com/HealthierMO) or Twitter @[aHealthierMO](https://twitter.com/aHealthierMO) or email Communications Coordinator Jaci McReynolds at jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org. Learn more about the initiative and how you can get involved at HealthierMO.org.