Overview

The accreditation of public health agencies is expected to play a significant role in strengthening the performance, effectiveness and accountability of the governmental public health system. After extensive study, a national voluntary accreditation program was endorsed by the American Public Health Association, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, and the National Association of Local Boards of Health. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Public Health Accreditation Board was incorporated in 2007 and the voluntary national accreditation program was launched in September 2011.

Legal Issues

States will need a strong legal and policy foundation to support participation in the national voluntary accreditation program. Numerous legal and policy questions will need to be addressed as state and local leaders determine their approach to accreditation and consider models that allow small local health agencies to partner together to meet accreditation standards and measures. For example:

• In order to administer an accreditation program, what type of legal structure (policy-, regulation-, or statute-based) is best suited to a particular state’s needs?
• Will changes be needed in a state’s existing laws or regulations to merge a state-based accreditation program with the national program?
• How can legal approaches assist with accreditation funding issues and options?
• What are the legal implications of different models for shared service delivery (e.g., cooperation, consolidation)?
• What legal changes may be needed within a particular state for jurisdictions to have the necessary legal authority to share the delivery of essential public health services?
• What are the advantages and disadvantages of various legal and policy arrangements to support shared service delivery, such as memoranda of understanding, contracts or other documentation to permit local health jurisdictions to share personnel and other resources?
Key/Select State Laws and Policies

- **Michigan**'s mandatory accreditation program is based on broad public health powers to “establish minimum standards of scope, quality, and administration for the delivery of required and allowable services.” See [MCL 333.2472 (1978)](https://www.lsa.umich.edu/laws/mcl/333/2472.htm).
- **Missouri**'s voluntary accreditation program is policy-based. The Missouri Institute for Community Health (MICH) is the accrediting body for Missouri’s Voluntary Accreditation Program for Local Public Health Agencies. [Click here](https://www.mich.org/) to link to MICH’s Accreditation Manual.
- **North Carolina** [General Statutes 130A-34.1](https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/nc-health-performance-standards.aspx) established an accreditation system for local health departments in 2005, as recommended by the public health task force. The legislation outlines the membership of a governing board to be established within the North Carolina Institute for Public Health. The Rules Commission adopted permanent [Accreditation Rules](https://www.phaboard.org/standards-and-credit/criteria-and-standards), which were effective October 1, 2006.

Selected Articles, Presentations and Reports


Resources and Links

- [Massachusetts Public Health Regionalization Project](https://www.bu.edu/globalhealth/research/2011/01/10/massachusetts-public-health-regionalization/) at the Boston University School of Public Health. Contains links to the Working Group’s recommendations and reports.
- The [Missouri Institute for Community Health](https://www.mich.org/) (MICH) is the accrediting body for Missouri’s Voluntary Accreditation Program for Local Public Health Agencies.
- [Multi-State Learning Collaborative (MLC): Lead States in Public Health Quality Improvement](https://www.mich.org/). Contains link to an eCatalog with over 100 accreditation-related documents.
- [National Association of City and County Health Officials (NACCHO): Accreditation and Quality Improvement Web site](https://www.naccho.org/). Provides tools, resources and training opportunities to local health departments (LHDs) to assist in their preparation for accreditation.
- [NACCHO: Regionalization Web site](https://www.naccho.org/). Contains links to evaluations of efforts in Kansas and Massachusetts to develop and consider new regional local arrangements as a means of meeting the standards and measures in the [Operational Definition of a Functional LHD](https://www.phaboard.org/standards-and-credit/criteria-and-standards), which is serving as the framework for the Public Health Accreditation Board’s (PHAB) voluntary national accreditation standards.
- [North Carolina Local Health Department Accreditation](https://www.nciph.org/). In 2002, the North Carolina Division of Public Health and the North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors undertook an initiative to develop a mandatory, standards-based system for accrediting local public health departments throughout the state. Since 2002, the [North Carolina Institute for Public Health](https://www.nciph.org/) (NCIPH) has provided Accreditation staff support.
- [Public Health Accreditation Board](https://www.phaboard.org/). The Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) is developing a national voluntary accreditation program for state, local, territorial and tribal public health departments.
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This document was developed by Gene Matthews, director of the Network for Public Health Law–Southeastern Region at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, with assistance from Milissa Markiewicz, project manager. The Network for Public Health Law provides information and technical assistance on issues related to public health. The legal information and assistance provided in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, please consult specific legal counsel.