



State and Partner Report 2007*

State: Connecticut

Date: May 29, 2007

Contact: Deputy Commissioner Norma Gyle, RN, PhD
Local Public Health Nurses Liaison
Barbara Dingfelder, APRN-BC, BSN, MPH, CHES

Email: norma.gyle@ct.gov
barbara.dingfelder@ct.gov

Phone: (860) 509-7660

Fax: (860) 509-7782

Projects/Issues Addressed This Year:

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) formed the virtual Office of Public Health Nurses to provide a focal point within the Department to foster improved collaborations and coordination of public health nursing activities statewide. A dedicated team of nurses and other key staff led by Deputy Commissioner Norma Gyle, RN, PhD are working to facilitate linkages, collaborations and communication across programs and provide a link with the Local Health Administration Branch, the liaison to Connecticut's local health departments.

An assessment to provide context for strategic planning to enhance a statewide public health nursing network was initiated. A report to document and provide a profile of nurses working in Connecticut's health departments was completed. The assessment was the preliminary step in analyzing the capacity of the nurses working in Connecticut's health departments (state and local). The report encompasses:

- What are the roles of nurses working in public health systems?
- Where are nurses integrated into the public health systems?
- Who are the nurses in Connecticut's health departments?
- What roles do nurses fill in the state and local health departments?
- Are the scope and standards of public health nursing integrated into practice in Connecticut's health departments?
- What are recommendations to enhance a statewide public health nursing network in Connecticut?

On February 26, 2007, DPH and the virtual Office of Public Health Nurses launched a public health nursing initiative to kick off bi-annual meetings focused on:

- 1) Providing a forum for nurses working in Connecticut's health departments (State and local) to discuss the uniqueness of the public health nursing profession and the range of issues affecting practice.
- 2) Sharing updates on national efforts to enhance the public health nursing workforce.
- 3) Introducing the DPH virtual Office of Public Health Nurses.



State and Partner Report 2007*

- 4) Gleaning input from nurses affiliated with local health departments and nurse educators to determine priorities on ways for strengthening a public health nursing network.

In addition, the Connecticut Association of Public Health Nurses (CAPHN) celebrated their 5th year. This year's annual meeting theme was "Distinguishing Public Health Nurses and the People We Serve." During the past year the CAPHN Executive Board participated in a retreat for a self- assessment and strategic planning concerning the organization's mission and goals. The Association continues to focus on strengthening relationships and forming new linkages with other professional associations, advocacy groups, schools of nursing and public health, and local and state health departments/districts. The current CAPHN Board is comprised of members from all of the these sections and have taken an active role in assuring the involvement of public health nurses in a number of collaborations in the state. Members of the Board currently serve on the:

- Connecticut Influenza and Pneumococcal Coalition
- Connecticut Partnership for Workforce Development
- Connecticut Public Health Association
- Coalition for the Safe and Health Connecticut
- Quarantine and Isolation Planning Committee
- Connecticut Public Health Preparedness Advisory Committee
- Connecticut Health Care Workforce Coalition
- Universal Access Shelter State Workgroup
- DPH virtual Office of Public Health Nurses
- Regional Public Health Emergency Response Planning Committees (ESF 8)
- Connecticut Nurses Association

Projects/Issues Pending:

- Collect data to complete a more comprehensive assessment of the nurses that makeup Connecticut's public health workforce and distinguish the nurses' contributions to carrying out the essential public health services by:
 - Completing a survey to better define and identify all nurses, regardless of job title, that makeup the DPH workforce and evaluate the current competencies and practice skills
 - Refining the Local Health Administration Annual Report to better define and identify all nurses working in the local health departments/districts
- Development of a Public Health Nurses in Action Portfolio showcasing the diverse roles of nurses and the varied projects, programs, and work
- Develop/adapt an orientation for nurses new to DPH or local health departments
- Establish a Web-page link for the virtual Office of Public Health Nurses with the DPH homepage to post announcements and improve sharing of resources



State and Partner Report 2007*

- Further development of public health emergency response preparedness planning, exercising and training
- Further development of regional plans for alternate care sites and shelters for populations with special needs
- National public health performance standards program
- Strategic priorities of the CAPHN Board for the upcoming year include:
 - Designing additional recruitment strategies to attract new members and keep them engaged in the association
 - Continuing to improve public health nursing practice through education and professional development activities
 - Exploring academic initiatives that support students and new professionals
 - Improving organizational effectiveness and financial stability
 - Expanding CAPHN impact through partnerships at the local, state and regional level

Issues and Special Concerns for Public Health Nursing:

Based on the preliminary assessment of Connecticut's health departments (state and local) challenges identified as affecting public health nursing include the:

- General lack of understanding of skills and knowledge nurses bring to the public health agencies
- Lack of clearly defined roles for nurses working in the health departments
- Need to provide models and descriptions for how nurses can be used in public health
- Lack of an orientation to include the integration of the basic core public health nursing competencies for all new nursing staff
- Lack of a developed peer support network for nurses in health departments, both state and local
- Limited number of nurses with public health training joining the health department staff
- Nurses themselves limiting their roles related to a reluctance to move into broader public health issues, difficulty-envisioning nursing role, and limited understanding of the scope of functions of health departments
- Unions limiting possibilities for nurses working in public health with positions based on medical model and health care settings
- Lack of incentives (i.e., neither financial, advancement, or recognition) for nurses to pursue continued or advanced academic preparation or certification
- Continued differences in the local health department infrastructure, and subsequently, the varied capacity affecting staffing, resources, and services provided