



## State Report

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### Connecticut 2008 State Report for Public Health Nurses

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) Virtual Office of Public Health Nurses' (VOPHN) mission is to foster professional development through collaboration and education of nurses working in public health. For the past year the VOPHN has focused on sustaining and building on last year's efforts to distinguish public health nursing in Connecticut from traditional nursing. The VOPHN has established itself as a leader for public health nurses and focal point, facilitating information sharing and continuing education to support nurses working in the health departments (i.e., State and Local), administrators, educators, and community and agency partners.

Priorities for the VOPHN include:

1. Fostering a collective voice for public health nurses
2. Promoting a public health nursing workforce based on core competencies and integration of the Public Health Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice (2007 ANA)
3. Identifying and promulgating best, evidence based practices in public health nursing
4. Developing infrastructure for sustainability at the State and local levels.

To summarize this year's activities, efforts focused on:

- Public health nurse workforce development through workshops, conferences, and training programs that include Continuing Education Units and transcripts
- Promoting partnerships with associations and communities for comprehensive public health initiatives
- Providing resources that enhance the practice of public health nursing
- Engaging in efforts with our local health partners and DPH staff to foster standardization of services and promote a performance management system
- Enhancing information exchange networks with nurses working in public health and affiliated professional organizations
- Systematically evaluating the effectiveness of the Virtual Office of Public Health Nurses and outcomes from projects (VOPHN Progress Report September 2007)
- Refining the strategic plan for the VOPHN clearly articulating the vision and direction (e.g., logic model, brochures)

### Projects/Issues Addressed This Year:

- **Leadership in Public Health Nursing:** During the past year the VOPHN has focused on strengthening collaborations with professional organization and the Schools of Nursing in Connecticut with programs

for Public/Community Health Nurses to promote the practice of public health nursing. The VOPHN staff are working with the Schools of Nursing and invited them to participate as presenters during workshops and seminars. Additional efforts focus on collaborations with the Connecticut Association of Public Health Nurses, and strengthening relationships with the Connecticut Nurses Association, Connecticut Public Health Association, and the Black Nurses Association. Collaborations have focused on increasing the awareness of public health nursing and evolved into the following activities (the list is a summary and not all inclusive):

- Attendance and participant at the ASTDN annual conference
  - May 12, 2007, DPH celebration recognizing the nursing staff video
  - September 6, 2007 – Presentation and panel participant at the Black Nurses Association – Renaissance of Nurses Conference
  - September 15, 2007, workshop for nurses at the DPH, *Public Health Nurses Scope and Standards of Practice* presented by Philip A. Greiner, DNSc, RN, Fairfield University
  - September 26, 2007 – VOPHN sponsored conference, *Building Bridges for Nurses Working in Public Health*
  - October 26, 2007, workshop during the Connecticut Public Health Association annual conference, *Raising the Bar by Building Bridges* with Dr. Kristine Gebbie a guest speaker
  - October 29, 2007 – workshop during the Connecticut Nurses Association annual conference, the *DPH Initiatives and Genomics*
- **Continuing Education:** the International Association licenses The DPH as a Continuing Education provider for Continuing Education and Training (IACET), which is recognized by the American Nurses Association for credible continuing education. The VOPHN staff has worked with the DPH Workforce and Professional Development office to promote education opportunities focusing on nurses and integration with the TRAIN Connecticut on-line services.
  - **Public Health System Orientation and Resource Guide for Local Health Department Officials:** The purposes of this guide are to: 1) enhance the transition for new local public health officials, 2) review the scope of responsibilities of Connecticut's local health departments/districts, and 3) provide guidance and general information about Connecticut's public health system. This guide has been developed adapting guidance materials from other states and applying it to the provision of services through Connecticut's public health system. The orientation guide includes a module introducing public health nursing and the scope of roles a nurse may engage to carry out public health initiatives and programs. The guide has been developed as a resource for the diverse local health officials, to include members of the Local Boards of Health, new Local Health Directors, Environmental Sanitarians, and Public Health Nurses. The guide has been pilot tested and feedback for enhancement is being incorporated in the next revision.
  - **Public Health Nursing Orientation Program:** Workforce development of public health nurses is one of the main priorities of the VOPHN. Although an orientation to the specific program and section is provided to all new staff in both the state and local health departments. Connecticut has not had an organized orientation for nurses new to public health. During the past year information was gathered to identify available resources and existing orientation programs. In addition, the VOPHN has collaborated with the diverse programs within DPH and local health directors to determine key areas that need to be included in an orientation. Subsequently, a workshop to introduce the scope of public health programs, services, and initiatives has been established for nurses new to the local health departments.
  - **Promoting Standardized Services:** During the past year members of the VOPHN have participated in discussions that engaged the local health directors and DPH staff in completing a needs assessment through a 'strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats' analysis. In addition, preparations for completing the National Public Health Performance Standards Program State Assessment have been coordinated and scheduled for June 2008. Further, members of the VOPHN are participating in a *Standards of Care for Emergency Response Workgroup* convened by the Commissioner of DPH.
  - **Inter-Agency Supportive Care Shelter Initiative:** The DPH has convened an inter-agency workgroup to foster standardized and coordinated emergency response for temporary shelters for vulnerable populations that require assistance with functional activities. The VOPHN provides leadership for the workgroup and advocacy for the vulnerable populations, promoting increased awareness of the scope

of needs involved in supporting those vulnerable populations that require assistance with activities of daily living and have limited family or other care assistants. The purposes of the workgroup are to 1) coordinate efforts among the multiple state agencies, 2) foster improved communication and integration of plans, 3) enhance information gathering and sharing, and 4) to assure the provision of temporary shelters for the vulnerable populations with special needs that are beyond the scope of congregate and universal access shelters.

- **Updates on some of the Public Health Initiative lead by Public Health Nurses:**

- The DPH Asthma Program has successfully executed a regional approach in its implementation of the State Asthma Plan. Data collected through the 2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and from reported hospitalization admissions have provided context for the targeted interventions. Initiatives implemented include home environmental assessment program, and professional and patient education program, which incorporated the “Tools for Schools Program”. The DPH Asthma Program’s goals are to continue regional initiatives to support indoor air-quality initiatives in schools and work places, which have been instituted in over 700 of the 1,200 schools in CT. Further; the initiative is expanding to encompass technical schools and offices buildings across the state.
- The DPH launched a new program in November, 2007 to designate hospitals as primary stroke centers (PSC) in an effort to improve health outcomes for people at risk for or with a presumptive diagnosis of stroke. Hospitals are assessed by DPH to assure that a PSC has the necessary infrastructure, staffing, and services to stabilize and treat most acute stroke patients. The criteria for primary stroke center designation status were developed by consensus with Connecticut clinicians and stakeholders invested in improving stroke related morbidities and mortalities. The group adapted criteria from the American Stroke Association practice standards for the treatment of acute stroke patients and recommendations from the Brain Attack Coalition Guidelines. Seven hospitals have applied for PSC status; results are pending.

### **Projects/Issues Pending:**

In addition to the works in progress (i.e., identified above) and on-going public health services, initiatives some of the pending special projects that have public health nursing leadership include::

- Establishing a Web-page link for the VOPHN in conjunction with the DPH homepage to post announcements and promote activities that focus public health nursing (draft of web-page and pilot testing of project under review by June 2008)
- Development of a Public Health Nurses in Action Portfolio showcasing the diverse roles of nurses in Connecticut’s public health system (examples collected and draft under review)
- Further development and integration of public health nurses in emergency response planning and preparation for response activities

### **Issues & Special Concerns for Public Health Nursing ... in Connecticut:**

- Lack of standardized provision of services and programs in health departments (i.e., State and Local)
- Continued differences in capacity of local health infrastructure to carry out services and support for staff/resources in municipalities and health districts
- Limited resources and competing priorities (e.g., political influences, funding, staffing, community health needs, programs, etc)
- Challenges with clearly defining the relationship of the public health nurses’ impact with providing preventives services for community activities (i.e., need for data to clarify impact, distinguish influence)
- Need to articulate and provide evidence-based models and descriptions of how nurses can be utilized to carry out the provision of public health services and initiatives
- Unions limiting possibilities for nurses working in public health with positions based on a ‘medical model’ and traditional institution-based health care settings
- Nursing shortage and lack of incentives (i.e., neither financial, advancement, or recognition) for nurse to pursue continued or advanced academic preparation or certification in public/community health nursing