

Health and Disability Success Story: Region 2 of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Public Health



Background

Local health departments (LHDs) can help to reduce and eliminate disparities in health experienced by people with disabilities by including them in all health programs, services, and activities. In spring 2014, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) surveyed LHDs across the country to understand better how they were including people with disabilities in programs and services. One respondent, Region 2 of the Louisiana Office of Public Health, stood out as being particularly inclusive of people with disabilities in public health practice. The Louisiana Office of Public Health met with NACCHO to discuss how the health department includes people with disabilities in its public health practice. NACCHO has produced this success story as a model for LHDs looking to become more inclusive of people with disabilities.

History of Success

In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Title V of the Social Security Act to secure federal aid to all states and territories for maternal and child health services, services for children with special health needs, and child welfare services. Louisiana initiated its program in 1939, and by 1950, Crippled Children's Services operated six outpatient clinics, including one in the Baton Rouge area. This program was later renamed Children's Special Health Services (CSHS) and incorporated into Region 2 of the Louisiana Office of Public Health. Region 2 is an LHD that encompasses seven parishes serving a total population of over 670,000. Its health unit in East Baton Rouge Parish houses CSHS clinics, which provide medical and care coordination services. Through this shared history, Region 2 has been serving people with disabilities for over 60 years since first receiving a grant to fund CSHS.

The inclusion of people with disabilities has become a defining part of Region 2's culture. According to the 2012 National Survey of Children's Health, 22.9% of children in Louisiana have a special healthcare need, a rate significantly higher than the national average of 19.8%. Region 2 has responded, and people with disabilities served by Region 2 not only have access to healthcare services but also are included in program planning and employment efforts. In addition, staff at Region 2 regularly train for and learn about working with people with disabilities. Region 2 plans to maintain this strong tradition of working with people with disabilities in the future. As one employee noted, "When you include people with disabilities in your public health practice, there is always a valuable learning experience that can enhance future work."

Health and Disability Facts

- One in every five Americans lives with at least one disability, and more people may develop a disability as the baby-boomer population ages.^{1,2}
- People may experience many types of disabilities, including difficulties with hearing, seeing, moving, thinking, learning, and communicating.
- People with disabilities experience an increase in secondary conditions (e.g., obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and negative outcomes after a disaster/emergency) when compared to members of the general population.³⁻⁶

Keys to Success

What programs/services are offered to people with disabilities?

Region 2 includes people with disabilities in all public health services and activities, such as immunizations, obesity prevention, tobacco cessation, injury prevention, family planning, communicable disease testing and treatment, and emergency preparedness planning. Region 2 never excludes people with disabilities from programs or services.

Louisiana receives federal money to fund CSHS and can therefore provide a wide range of clinical services to children with special healthcare needs living in medically underserved areas. As part of this program, private practice physicians (e.g., neurologists, orthopedists, and pediatricians) offer services to the clinic at a nominal cost. The clinic also has a support team of nurses, social workers, nutritionists, and parent liaisons that work with the physicians to provide care coordination and help carry out patient care plans. This support team is a large reason why this program has been so successful at Region 2.

How are people with disabilities included in program planning?

As a result of including people with disabilities in program planning and asking them about needed accommodations, Region 2 has learned how best to make its programs and services accessible to people with disabilities based upon their self-reported needs (e.g., elevators, ramps, automatic push door buttons, and special medical equipment). In addition, the statewide CSHS program supports Region 2 and other regional programs with parent consultants who provide ongoing advocacy training and support to regional parent liaisons. These liaisons participate in both program planning and local advisory boards and committees. The CSHS state office also includes parent consultants in strategic planning and policy development.

What are other ways people with disabilities are being included?

The culture of Region 2 is very inclusive of people with disabilities. Staff receive extensive training about working with people with disabilities and constantly try to think of ways to promote the health of their clients with disabilities. Staff use each interaction as an opportunity to help individuals with disabilities meet all of their health needs. For example, an employee from one work area (e.g., neurology) may identify and refer a person with a disability to receive services in another area (e.g., family planning, women's health, or flu vaccination).

What has helped make inclusion efforts be successful?

Region 2 staff truly care about their mission to serve people with disabilities and are always willing to learn more about how to best include people with disabilities in their public health practice. In addition to receiving funding to work with people with disabilities, Region 2 constantly reinforces inclusion as a priority and an integral part of the overall public health culture.

Region 2 also focuses on children with disabilities. Regional parent liaisons link families of children with special healthcare to additional support resources. These parent liaisons receive quarterly trainings on topics related to self-advocacy, community resources, insurance and healthcare funding options, education resources, early intervention services, and care coordination.

NACCHO's Health and Disability Program

NACCHO, with support from the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and The Arc of the United States, promotes the inclusion and engagement of people with disabilities in planning, implementing, and evaluating public health programs, products, and services.

NACCHO provides LHDs with practical strategies and recommendations, including tools and materials developed by peers and relevant information from partners. The program informs and educates LHDs about health and disability activities and resources, supports a peer-assistance network, and develops and shares model practices related to health promotion activities for people with disabilities.

NACCHO Resources for LHDs

- *Strategies for Successfully Including People with Disabilities in Health Department Programs, Plans and Services*

<http://eweb.naccho.org/prd/?na598pdf>

- *Directory of Community-Based Organizations Serving People with Disabilities*

<http://eweb.naccho.org/prd/?na597pdf>



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