# Delaware Public Health Laboratory System Assessment
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The Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Laboratory Systems, developed the State Public Health Laboratory System Assessment using the Ten Essential Public Health Services as the measurement tool and incorporating the eleven Core State Public Health Laboratory Functions.  The assessment instrument is based on the work of the National Public Health Performance Standards Program (NPHPSP), APHL, and their partners.  Evaluation of the capacity and capability of the state public health laboratory system, involves not only evaluation of the state laboratory, but of the entire system which includes those who collect the samples, those who analyze the samples, those who use the results, and those who participate in the delivery of the samples and results.

The assessment process highlights strengths and weaknesses of the system that facilitate informed, effective policy and resource decisions resulting in an improved public health laboratory system.  The results gathered through this process provide an understanding of how state public health laboratories and the systems within which they are functioning are performing.

Delaware held an assessment of the State Public Health Laboratory System on December 10, 2008 at the Smyrna Opera House.  The assessment was conducted in a one day public meeting to which all partners and stakeholders were invited. For Delaware, the process was intended to spark greater coordination in the laboratory system, to identify duplication of services, inefficiencies, gaps and potential for sharing equipment, staff, and other resources.  Success would be a stronger continuity of operations plan for the laboratory system, a more relevant and meaningful strategic plan for the Delaware Public Health Laboratory (DPHL) and improved mutual understanding for all system partners

Following a plenary session designed to introduce the assessment process to stakeholders; the fifty-seven individuals conducted their first assessment as a whole group and then were divided into three groups for the remainder of the Essential Services (ES).  The breakouts were as follows:

**All Attendees**
Essential Service # 7: Monitor Health Status to Identify Community Health Problems

**Group A**
- Essential Service # 3: Inform, Educate, and Empower People about Health Issues
- Essential Service # 4: Mobilize Community Partnerships to Identify and Solve Health Problem
- Essential Service # 9: Evaluate Effectiveness, Accessibility, and Quality of Personal and Population Based Services

**Group B**
- Essential Service #2: Diagnose and Investigate Health Problems and Health Hazards in the Community
- Essential Service # 5: Develop Policies and Plans That Support Individual And Community Health Efforts
- Essential Service # 6: Enforce Laws and Regulations That Protect Health and Ensure Safety

**Group C**
- Essential Service # 1: Monitor Health Status to Identify Community Health Problems
- Essential Service # 8: Assure a Competent Public Health and Personal Health Care Workforce
- Essential Service # 10: Research for Insights and Innovative Solutions to Health Problems

The three groups were lead by facilitators from the Division of Public Health (not from the DPHL) and a contracted facilitator. Each group had one DPHL theme taker to record notes and observations and one DPHL Laboratory Resource person to provide technical input. The groups were asked to discuss the components for each essential service and give the State Public Health Laboratory System a ranking based on the level of activity.

The Delaware State Public Health Laboratory System scored as follows:

**Optimal Activity – Greater than 75% of the activity described in the question is met within the public health laboratory system**
Essential Service #2: Diagnose and Investigate Health Problems and Health Hazards in the Community

**Significant Activity – Greater than 50%, but no more than 75% of the activity described in the question is met within the public health laboratory system**

Essential Service # 1: Monitor Health Status to Identify Community Health Problems

Essential Service # 3: Inform, Educate, and Empower People about Health Issues
Essential Service # 5: Develop Policies and Plans That Support Individual And Community Health Efforts
Essential Service # 6: Enforce Laws and Regulations That Protect Health and Ensure Safety
Essential Service # 8: Assure a Competent Public Health and Personal Health Care Workforce

**<u>Moderate Activity</u> – Greater than 25%, but no more than 50% of the activity described in the question is met within the public health laboratory system**

Essential Service # 7: Monitor Health Status to Identify Community Health Problems

**<u>Minimal Activity</u> – Great than zero, but no more than 25% of the activity described in the question is met within the public health laboratory system**

Essential Service # 4: Mobilize Community Partnerships to Identify and Solve Health Problem
Essential Service # 9: Evaluate Effectiveness, Accessibility, and Quality of Personal and Population Based Services
Essential Service # 10: Research for Insights and Innovative Solutions to Health Problems

**Next steps** fell into three categories, those to be implemented by the DPHL, those to be implemented by the Division of Public Health (DPH), and those which require involvement of DPH partners.  Next steps identified include:

- o Develop a plan to strengthen and connect data systems to include an assessment of the capacity of DHIN (Delaware Health Information Network) to connect state-wide medical information and integrate computer systems for two-way communications
- o Finalize Memoranda of Understanding (MOU's) with partner laboratories to assure testing services are not interrupted and continuity of operations plans are completed
- o Continue focus on workforce development and efforts to make state merit system laboratory salaries competitive
- o Increase information sharing and education efforts through improved web site, LabOrator, Lab Week, press releases, etc.
- o Develop advocacy groups for a State Public Health Laboratory System (government, legislation and teachers, schools)
- o Define the mission for the SPH Laboratory System, determine roles and responsibilities for each partner and prepare a SPH Laboratory System communication plan
- o Examine the role of the Lab Preparedness Advisory Committee (LPAC)

- Evaluate state laws and regulations regularly to determine changes that need to be made and enforcement measures that need to be taken
- Establish a state education training coordinator position for the public health laboratory system

Overall, the stakeholders felt that the assessment was an effective process. One benefit of the process was the process itself. It provided an opportunity to build relationships with other contributors to the system, and to ask questions such as: What is my role in the system? Do we need to change the system? Is it worthwhile to do so, and if so do we need a formal process or an informal process? What parts of system were not represented today? Is collaboration in the system more likely as a result of today? What are the boundaries between the personal health and public health lab system? Did participation in the assessment change participant perspectives about the public health system and how do we capitalize on that? Where is the home for this? Is DPH the owner?

Participants recommended additional working groups and meetings with missing stakeholders to formally develop a working public health laboratory system committee to include the representation of all key policy and decision makers. A follow-up meeting is being planned during National Medical Laboratory Week, April 19-25. Look for more information about this in the coming weeks.