

1 Public Health Language

All industries, cultures, and groups of people use terms that reflect what is important to them. This “language” helps to improve understanding and create effective communication. This is true for the disability community as well as for health, public health, emergency management, and other public agencies.

As much as group terminology helps to facilitate effective internal communication, it can also inadvertently exclude, confuse, or create barriers for effective communication with a broader audience.

The ways in which state and local governments organize and fund public health systems and deliver public health services vary across and within states. This includes the agency or organization tasked with carrying out all or some of the public health functions. In some states, the local public health department is an extension of the state public health agency. In other states, local public health departments are funded and managed by the city or county. It is important that, in the preparation stage, you research and understand the infrastructure of public health in your area.

It is important to remember that organizations external to the local public health department may also provide community health, clinical, behavioral or mental health services in an area. In this case, these external organizations should not only be seen as a critical partner in planning and responding to disaster, but also as key partners in improving health equity day to day.

For these workbooks, the term “public health departments” refers to traditional public health agencies or departments funded and managed through city, county

or state government, as well as nonprofit or private organizations that provide services in the form of clinical health services, public health vaccines, or mental or behavioral health services.

Public health departments, service providers and disability stakeholders alike benefit when they understand the terms, meaning, and purpose of each other's terminology.

Understanding the Language

Below is a list of common terms used by and useful to public health professionals and service providers. By completing this table with your own words in the box provided, you can create a resource to better communicate with, understand, and be understood by agencies.

Biostatistics

Definition:

Field of public health that uses statistics to better understand disease patterns across populations. Biostatisticians gather and analyze data related to how biological factors like infectious diseases and pathogens impact human health.

In My Own Words:

Clinical care

Definition:

The prevention, treatment, and management of illness and the preservation of mental and physical well-being through services offered by medical and allied health professions; also known as health care.

In My Own Words:

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Definition:

Community-level program administered by FEMA that trains citizens to better understand how to prepare for a disaster, stay safe in a disaster, and assist with the immediate disaster response as appropriate.

In My Own Words:

Continuity of operations plan (COOP)

Definition:

An effort to ensure that essential functions within an agency continue to be performed during disruptions or disasters.

In My Own Words:

Determinant

Definition:

A factor that contributes to the generation of a trait, effects a change in health condition, or other characteristic.

In My Own Words:

Disability inclusion

Definition:

Disability inclusion allows people with disabilities to take advantage of the benefits of the same health promotion and prevention activities experienced by people without disabilities.

In My Own Words:

Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Definition:

A physical or virtual location from which coordination and support of incident management activities are directed in a disaster response.

In My Own Words:

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Definition:

A state of readiness to respond to a disaster, crisis, or any other type of emergency situation including the steps that are taken to protect and preserve life and property before a disaster, and to implement the plans during a disaster.

In My Own Words:

Environmental health services

Definition:

Environmental health services refer to the detection and alleviation of unhealthy conditions of the environment of the catchment area, such as problems associated with water supply, sewage treatment, solid waste disposal, rodent and parasite infestation, and housing conditions.

Example: Environmental health scientists collect and analyze data to understand how environmental factors affect public health and well-being.

In My Own Words:

Epidemiology

Definition:

The study (scientific, systematic, and data-driven) of the distribution (frequency, pattern) and determinants (causes, risk factors) of health-related states and events (not just diseases) in specified populations (neighborhood, school, city, state, country, global). [What is Public Health? | CDC Foundation](#)

In My Own Words:

Exercise

Definition:

An instrument to train for, assess, practice, and improve performance in prevention, protection, response, and recovery capabilities in a risk-free environment.

In My Own Words:

Global health

Definition:

Area of study, research, and practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health for all people worldwide.

In My Own Words:

Health Disparity

Definition:

Preventable differences in burden of disease, injury, violence or in opportunities to achieve optimal health experienced by socially disadvantaged racial, ethnic and other population groups and communities.

In My Own Words:

Health outcome

Definition:

Result of a medical condition that directly affects the length or quality of a person's life.

In My Own Words:

Incident Command System (ICS)

Definition:

A standardized incident management strategy used to create an organizational structure and hierarchy for managing temporary incidents of any size. Procedures should be pre-established and personnel should be well-trained prior to an incident.

In My Own Words:

Isolation

Definition:

The complete separation from others when a person has a contagious or infectious disease.

In My Own Words:

Joint Information Center (JIC)

Definition:

- A structure that integrates incident information and public affairs into a cohesive organization designed to provide consistent, coordinated, accurate, accessible, timely, and complete information during crisis or incident operations.
- A working location, where multiple jurisdictions gather, process, and disseminate public information during an emergency.

In My Own Words:

Outbreak or epidemic

Definition:

Occurrence in a community or region of cases of an illness, specific health-related behavior, or other health-related event clearly in excess of normal expectancy. Both terms are used interchangeably; however, epidemic usually refers to a larger geographic area of illness or health-related event.

In My Own Words:

Pandemic

Definition:

Denoting a disease affecting or attacking the population of an extensive region, country, or continent.

In My Own Words:

Points of dispensing (POD)

Definition:

Community locations at which state and local agencies or other organizations make health, medical and disaster supplies available to the public. There are two types of PODs, open and closed. Open PODs are usually operated by local public health agencies in public locations like schools, community centers and arenas. Closed PODs are operated by public and private agencies to dispense supplies to their own populations.

In My Own Words:

Population health

Definition:

An approach to health that aims to improve the health status and health outcomes of an entire population.

In My Own Words:

Prevention effectiveness

Definition:

The systematic assessment of the impact of public health policies, programs, and practices on health outcomes by determining their effectiveness, safety, and costs.

In My Own Words:

Public health

Definition:

The science and practice of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities.

In My Own Words:

Public health informatics

Definition:

Systematic application of information, computer science, and technology to public health practice, research, and learning.

In My Own Words:

Public Health Intervention

Definition:

Any effort or policy that attempts to improve mental and physical health on a population level.

In My Own Words:

Public health surveillance

Definition:

The ongoing, systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of health-related data essential to planning, implementing and evaluation of public health practices

In My Own Words:

Quarantine

Definition:

The separation and movement restriction of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become ill.

In My Own Words:

Recovery committee

Definition:

A group of people who help individuals and communities recover and restore their lives after a disaster and achieve an effective level of functioning. They can coordinate information, resources, and services; establish priorities; and provide information and advice to the affected community and recovery agencies.

In My Own Words:

Social Determinants of Health

Definition:

Any definable factor or condition that effects a change in health condition or other health impacting characteristic of the environment in which people live.

In My Own Words:

Working group

Definition:

A group of experts working together to achieve a specific goal.

In My Own Words:

Shared understanding of key terms and their usage helps all parties involved to address and overcome barriers and challenges to health equity. Furthermore, relationships and partnerships can be developed that highlight shared goals and commitments to health equity for people with disabilities in disasters.

CDC Statement

This project was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award to the CDC Foundation totaling \$1,900,000.00 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.