History of the Partners 1995-2003

Origins

On April 20, 1995 the Public Health Service sponsored a conference at the National Library of Medicine (NLM), during which leaders in the National Information Infrastructure (NII) and population health communities came together to explain their work to each other, delineate the barriers that discourage application of NII technologies to the information problems of population-based public health, and lay out a comprehensive strategy for moving forward. Following this conference, the July 1995 report Making a Powerful Connection: the Health of the Public and the National Information Infrastructure[1] called for the Department of Health and Human Services to:

> "form a strategic partnership between [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] CDC, state and local public health associations, NLM, and the National Network of Libraries of Medicine [NN/LM] to train state and local public health officials in the use of currently available information resources that are applicable to public health." (Section 9.2)

Work on the parameters for the partnership began in earnest at a meeting of government agencies, the major associations representing the public health workforce, and the NN/LM held at NLM on January 9-10, 1997. As a result of this meeting, the basic outline for the program (i.e., goal, objectives, and major elements) was defined and a set of immediate action items was identified. The first action item was formulation of a Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee appointed to direct the joint program held its first meeting on May 5, 1997 at CDC in Atlanta. The Steering Committee was comprised of staff from CDC, NLM, NN/LM, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), and the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO). For the first year, the Steering Committee agreed to focus on:

> * Web links (between the participating organizations and to useful public health sites),
> * Publicizing existing programs (e.g., NLM's Internet connections grants, AIDS outreach projects, and informatics training programs as well as NLM and NN/LM services), and
> * An AIDS-focused training presentation on what public health departments can gain from the Internet and how the NN/LM can help public health departments.

CDC agreed to take the lead on the format and production of the training presentation; NLM agreed to take the lead on the content, with assistance from the other partners. This inaugural Steering Committee meeting resulted in a work plan for the partnership's first year.

On March 23, 1998, a fourth seminal meeting to help inform the emerging partnership was held. The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) and the NLM cosponsored a forum on *Accessing Useful Information: Challenges in Health Policy and Public Health*, at the NYAM. Proceedings of this forum are available in the Bulletin of The New York Academy of Medicine: A Journal of Urban Health (December 1998, Vol. 75, Issue 4, p. 779-895).[2-12]

Major Milestones

In May 1998, the initial Partners in Information Access for Public Health Professionals website was launched. It had two main information categories. "Tools for public health professionals" provided links to selected resources, education and training materials, and grants information. "About Partners" provided links to the program fact sheet (goals and objectives) and other background information, funded projects, and participant lists. The logos on the main page linked to the individual Partners' main URLs. This site was available until March 2003 when it was replaced by a redesigned site (see below).

Between 1998 and 2001, the NN/LM funded nearly 30 outreach projects targeted to public health. Detailed information on these projects is available, including work plans, staffing, and target audiences. Project staffs attended a Public Health Outreach Forum at NLM on April 4-5, 2001 where they shared their experiences and lessons learned. Information from the Forum is also available, including the agenda, slide presentations, and panel reports. Papers from the Forum appeared in a Special Report section of the October 2001 issue of the Bulletin of the Medical Library Association (Volume 89, Number 4) which is available in full text from PubMed Central. In 1999, another article describing the public health work of the NLM and the NN/LM also appeared in the Journal of the American Public Health Association.[13]

The first of three satellite broadcasts sponsored by the Partners and focusing on their resources was

aired February 11, 1999. "Accessing HIV/AIDS Information Resources" and the tutorials developed to supplement it are no longer available for viewing due to "aging" of the information they presented.

The second satellite broadcast on "Children's Environmental Health Information Resources" aired March 21, 2002. This broadcast may be viewed and materials developed for it are also available.

On January 31, 2003, a third Partners-focused broadcast (and webcast) aired. "Wired Communities: Putting the e in Public Health" is part of the CDC-sponsored Public Health Grand Rounds series.

In March 2003, following a 9-month redesign effort, an expanded and redesigned Partners in Information Access for the Public Health Workforce website was released. PHPartners.org includes 10 information categories (Health Promotion and Health Education, Literature and Guidelines, Health Data Tools and Statistics, Grants and Funding, Education and Training, Legislation, Conferences and Meetings, Finding People, Discussion and E-mail Lists, Jobs and Careers) plus links to News, About Partners, Suggest Link, and search functionality. Individual logos

were replaced with a new Partners logo. Individual Partners links now appear at the bottom of the homepage, and by the end of 2003 the partnership had expanded to include eleven member organizations:

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality ◆ American Public Health Association ◆ Association of Schools of Public Health ◆ Association of State and Territorial Health Officials ◆ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ◆ Health Resources and Services Administration ◆ National Association of County and City Health Officials ◆ National Library of Medicine ◆ National Network of Libraries of Medicine ◆ Public Health Foundation ◆ Society for Public Health Education.

An additional component of the Website redesign effort was a look at how the Partners could function more effectively in pursuit of mutual goals.   To address this component, all members of the Steering Committee were asked to complete the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool [14] which provides a way for members of a health-oriented partnership to indicate anonymously the strengths and weaknesses they derive from the partnership. Results from this assessment informed the Partners strategic planning session held in October 2003 (see below).

During 2001-2003, two new public health resources funded by the Partners were developed, tested, and promoted to or linked from PHPartners.org:

The Healthy People 2010 Information Access Project is designed to make information, resources, and evidence-based strategies related to the Healthy People 2010

objectives easier to find. Initially, National Library of Medicine and Public Health Foundation staff worked together to develop pre-formulated search strategies for eight selected Healthy People 2010 focus areas. Over time, librarians from the NN/LM and the Medical Library Association's Public Health/Health Administration section and subject matter experts from CDC and the public health workforce joined the project team. Work is underway to expand the range of searches by the end of CY2004 to cover at least one objective in each of the 28 Healthy People 2010 focus areas and to evaluate and market the resource.

The Resource Guide for Public Health Preparedness is a project directed by the New York Academy of Medicine, a Regional Medical Library of the NN/LM. It is designed to assess the health information needs of public health professionals with regard to disaster preparedness and bio-terrorist threats; streamline access to relevant documents and guidelines by creating and distributing a regularly updated Internet resource guide that directly links users to accurate and reliable sources of health-related preparedness information; and leverage existing information and outreach resources. The searchable web-based Resource Guide provides a single point of access to linked full-text resources in public health preparedness, selected by information specialists and reviewed by subject experts from a wide range of disciplines.

Future Directions
On October 29, 2003, the Steering Committee held a strategic planning session. As a result, the Partners mission and goals were revised. (Subsequently, a new fact sheet describing the partnership changes and an information card on NLM's public health resources were developed.)

For 2004-2006, the Partners mission is to help the public health workforce find and use information effectively to improve and protect the public's health. This will be achieved through five goals:

* Organize and deliver public health resources so they are easier to find and use.
* Identify and develop collaborative projects to meet the information needs of the public health workforce.
* Increase the visibility of the partnership with librarians and the public health workforce.
* Increase the information literacy of the public health workforce.
* Strengthen the collaboration among the Partners.

Work is underway on a three-year Strategic Plan which identified specific activities under each goal.

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