

Public Health Nursing Competencies*

Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations

The Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations is an alliance of the four national nursing organizations that address PHN issues: the Association of Community Health Nurse Educators (ACHNE), the American Nurses Association's Congress on Nursing Practice and Economics (ANA), the American Public Health Association-PHN Section (APHA), and the Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing (ASTDN). In 2000, prompted in part by work on educating the public health workforce being done under the leadership of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Quad Council began work on drafting a set of national PHN competencies.

The approach utilized by the Quad Council was to start with the Council on Linkages (COL) between Academia and Public Health Practice, "Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals," and to determine their application to two levels of PHN practice: the staff nurse/generalist role and the manager/specialist/consultant role. It was the Quad Council's intent to examine these COL competencies for their fit with PHN and to continue to identify and refine unique competencies for PHN. By selecting the COL competencies as the framework, the Quad Council felt that the competencies could provide a guide for agencies that employ public health nurses and academic settings to facilitate education, orientation, training and lifelong learning using an interdisciplinary model where appropriate.

Information about the composition and work of the Quad Council of Public Health Nursing Organizations can be found at the following web address: <http://www.uncc.edu/achne>.

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The COL list of core competencies "represents 10 years of work on this subject" by the 15-member organizations whose missions include improving public health education and practice. Over 1,000 public health professionals reviewed the list during a public comment period. "The Council utilized several mechanisms to receive feedback from reviewers, including e-mail, focus groups, sessions at various conferences and the competencies web site. The comments from public health professionals in a broad array of disciplines and practice settings led to this consensus set of core competencies for guiding public health workforce development efforts...The core competencies represent a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for the broad practice of public health. They transcend the boundaries of the specific disciplines within public health and help to unify the profession" (<http://www.trainingfinder.org/competencies>). The actual competency statements are the "property" of the COL and could not be modified by public health nursing (PHN) or the Quad Council during the process of looking at applicability to PHN practice. The Quad Council's focus was on how public health nurses apply those competencies and the expected level of performance for each competency statement.

Nursing-specific application of the competencies is necessary for specialized roles within PHN, and the COL's competencies have been used as the framework to develop them. However, because the COL's list captures only the crosscutting competencies for all public health professionals, it does not contain competencies that are specific to public health nursing. Note again: since the COL's competencies are for all public health professionals, even this PHN-specific draft does not include nursing competencies that are broader than public health (i.e., apply to many or all nurses).

The “Quad Council PHN Competencies” document is designed for use with others documents. It complements the “Definition of Public Health Nursing” adopted by the APHA’s PHN Section in 1996 and the *Scope and Standards of Public Health Nursing* (Quad Council, 1999). Differentiating PHN competencies at the generalist and specialist levels will help to clarify the PHN specialty for both the discipline of nursing and the profession of public health. In addition, the ability to identify PHN competencies should facilitate collaboration among public health nurses and other public health professionals in education, practice, and research in order to improve the public’s health.

In developing the competencies, the Quad Council members concurred that the generalist level would reflect preparation at the baccalaureate level. While recognizing that in many states much of the public health nursing workforce is not baccalaureate-prepared, the Quad Council believes that those nurses may require job descriptions that reflect a different level of practice and/or may require extensive orientation and education to achieve the competencies identified herein. Furthermore, the specialist level competencies described in this document reflect preparation at the master’s level in community/PHN and/or public health. Again, while recognizing that there may be other public health nurses who are promoted or appointed to managerial or consultant positions that require specialist competencies, master’s level education prepares public health nurses for the specialist level competencies identified in this document. At both levels, it is expected that a major focus of on-the-job training and continuing education for nurses hired for these positions who have less than a baccalaureate or master’s degree (as appropriate to the level) will be on assuring that these competencies are attained.

The Quad Council determined that, although the COL competencies were developed with the understanding that public health practice is population-focused and PHN is also population-focused, one of the unique contributions of public health nurses is the ability to apply these principles at the individual and family level *within the context of population-focused practice*. Therefore, many of the competency statements indicate a level of awareness, knowledge, or proficiency at the individual/family level. Because of their population or system-focused language, however, it was decided that several specific competency statements and three entire domains would

not include application at the individual/family level: “Domain 5—community dimensions of practice,” “Domain 7—financial planning and management skills,” and “Domain 8—leadership and systems thinking skills.” Finally, it was recognized that “groups” are entities which can be addressed at the individual/family level and at the population/system level. Therefore, when PHNs use the group format primarily to convey information targeted to individual or family approaches to health issues (e.g., a group format is used to teach newly diagnosed diabetics about the importance of diet and exercise, but the information targets individuals), this represents an application at the individual/family level.

Finally, the Quad Council based this document on the following additional assumptions:

- public health nurses must first possess the competencies common to all baccalaureate-prepared nurses (not addressed in this competency list) and then demonstrate these additional competencies specific to their roles in public health;
- the progression from awareness to knowledge to proficiency is a continuum, and there are no discrete boundaries between those levels of competence (note that definitions of each of these three levels appear at the bottom of each page of the competencies list);
- both levels reflect competencies for a reasonably prudent public health nurse who has experience in the role (i.e., not a “novice” and not in a specialized or limited focus role);
- these competencies are intended to reflect the standard for public health nursing practice, not necessarily what is occurring in practice today; and
- in any practice setting, the job descriptions may reflect components from each level, depending on the agency’s structure, size, leadership, and services.

In preparing this document, the Quad Council sought feedback on a draft of these competencies from nurses across the country who are members of one or more of its member organizations; more than 220 nurses, most of whom are directly involved in public health practice, provided specific comments on the draft. The Quad Council is grateful to all those public health nurses who took the time to review the draft and provide thoughtful comments. Their feedback was carefully considered in developing this final document.

DOMAIN 1: ANALYTIC ASSESSMENT SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Defines a problem	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
2. Determines appropriate uses and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative data	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
3. Selects and defines variables relevant to defined public health problems.	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
4. Identifies relevant and appropriate data and information sources	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
5. Evaluates the integrity and comparability of data and identifies gaps in data sources	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
6. Applies ethical principles to the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of data and information	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
7. Partners with communities to attach meaning to collected quantitative and qualitative data	N/A (see Note)	Knowledge	N/A (see Note)	Proficiency
8. Makes relevant inferences from quantitative and qualitative data	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
9. Obtains and interprets information regarding risks and benefits to the community	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
10. Applies data collection processes, information technology applications, and computer systems storage/retrieval strategies	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
11. Recognizes how the data illuminates ethical, political, scientific, economic, and overall public health issues	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency

Note. These competencies, because of their population or system-focused language, do not apply at the individual/family level, but are applicable to the broader context of population-focused public health services and systems.

DOMAIN 2: POLICY DEVELOPMENT/PROGRAM PLANNING SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Collects, summarizes, and interprets information relevant to an issue	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
2. States policy options and writes clear and concise policy statements	Awareness	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
3. Identifies, interprets, and implements public health laws, regulations, and policies related to specific programs	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
4. Articulates the health, fiscal, administrative, legal, social, and political implications of each policy option	Awareness	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
5. States the feasibility and expected outcomes of each policy option	Awareness	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
6. Utilizes current techniques in decision analysis and health planning	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
7. Decides on the appropriate course of action	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency	Proficiency
8. Develops a plan to implement policy, including goals, outcome and process objectives, and implementation steps	Proficiency	Knowledge	Awareness	Proficiency
9. Translates policy into organizational plans, structures, and programs	N/A (see <i>Note</i>)	Awareness	N/A (see <i>Note</i>)	Proficiency
10. Prepares and implements emergency response plans	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
11. Develops mechanisms to monitor and evaluate programs for their effectiveness and quality	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency

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DOMAIN 3: COMMUNICATION SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Communicates effectively both in writing and orally, or in other ways	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
2. Solicits input from individuals and organizations	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
3. Advocates for public health programs and resources	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
4. Leads and participates in groups to address specific issues	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
5. Uses the media, advanced technologies, and community networks to communicate information	Knowledge	Awareness	Knowledge*	Knowledge*
6. Effectively presents accurate demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for professional and lay audiences	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
7. Attitudes: Listens to others in an unbiased manner, respects points of view of others, and promotes the expression of diverse opinions and perspectives	Proficiency	Proficiency	Proficiency	Proficiency

* Reflects ability to determine need for and to utilize experts in these areas.

DOMAIN 4: CULTURAL COMPETENCY SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Utilizes appropriate methods for interacting sensitively, effectively, and professionally with persons from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, educational, racial, ethnic professional backgrounds, and persons of all ages and lifestyle and preferences	Proficiency	Proficiency	Proficiency	Proficiency
2. Identifies the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in determining the delivery of public health services	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
3. Develops and adapts approaches to problems that take into account cultural differences	Proficiency	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
4. Attitudes: Understands the dynamic forces contributing to cultural diversity	N/A (see Note)	Knowledge	N/A (see Note)	Proficiency
5. Attitudes: Understands the importance of diverse public health workforce	N/A (see Note)	Knowledge	N/A (see Note)	Proficiency

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DOMAIN 5: COMMUNITY DIMENSIONS OF PRACTICE SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Establishes and maintains linkages with key stakeholders		Knowledge		Proficiency
2. Utilizes leadership, team building, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills to build community partnerships		Knowledge		Proficiency
3. Collaborates with community partners to promote the health of population		Knowledge		Proficiency
4. Identifies how public and private organizations operate within a community		Knowledge		Proficiency
5. Accomplishes effective community engagements		Knowledge		Proficiency
6. Identifies community assets and available resources		Knowledge		Proficiency
7. Develops, implements, and evaluates a community public health assessment		Knowledge		Proficiency
8. Describes the role of government in the delivery of community health services		Knowledge		Proficiency

DOMAIN 6: BASIC PUBLIC HEALTH SCIENCES SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Identifies the individual's and organization's responsibilities within the context of the Essential Public Health Services and core functions	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
2. Defines, assesses, and understands the health status of populations, determinants of health and illness, factors contributing to health promotion and disease prevention, and factors influencing the use of health services	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
3. Understands the historical development, structure, and interaction of public health and health	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
4. Identifies and applies basic research methods used in public health	Awareness	Awareness	Knowledge	Knowledge
5. Applies the basic public health sciences including behavioral and social sciences, biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental public health, and prevention of chronic and infectious diseases and injuries	Awareness	Awareness	Knowledge	Knowledge
6. Identifies and retrieves current relevant scientific evidence	Knowledge	Knowledge	Proficiency	Proficiency
7. Identifies the limitations of research and the importance of observations and relationships	Awareness	Awareness	Knowledge	Knowledge
8. Attitudes: Develops a lifelong commitment to rigorous critical thinking	Proficiency	Proficiency	Proficiency	Proficiency

DOMAIN 7: FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS

	Generalist/Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive	
	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/Systems
1. Develops and presents a budget		Awareness		Proficiency
2. Manages programs within budget constraints		Knowledge		Proficiency
3. Applies budget processes		Awareness		Proficiency
4. Develops strategies for determining budget priorities		Awareness		Proficiency
5. Monitors program performance		Knowledge		Proficiency
6. Prepares proposals for funding from external sources		Awareness		Proficiency
7. Applies basic human relations skills to the management of organizations, motivation of personnel, and resolution of conflicts		Knowledge		Proficiency
8. Manages information systems for collection, retrieval, and use of data for decision-making		Awareness		Proficiency
9. Negotiates and develops contracts and other documents for the provision of population-based services		Awareness		Proficiency
10. Conducts cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost utility analyses		Awareness		Proficiency

DOMAIN 8: LEADERSHIP AND SYSTEMS THINKING SKILLS

	Generalist/ Staff PHN		Manager/CNS/Consultant/Program Specialist/Executive Individuals and families	
	Individuals and families	Populations/ Systems	Individuals and families	Populations/ Systems
1. Creates a culture of ethical standards within organizations and communities		Knowledge		Proficiency
2. Helps create key values and shared vision and uses these principles to guide action		Knowledge		Proficiency
3. Identifies internal and external issues that may impact delivery of essential public health services (i.e. strategic planning)		Knowledge		Proficiency
4. Facilitates collaboration with internal and external groups to ensure participation of key stakeholders		Knowledge		Proficiency
5. Promotes team and organizational learning		Knowledge		Proficiency
6. Contributes to development, implementation, and monitoring of organizational performance standards		Knowledge		Proficiency
7. Uses the legal and political system to effect change		Knowledge		Proficiency
8. Applies theory of organizational structures to professional practice		Awareness		Proficiency