



TIPS for a Successful Problem Analysis and Identification of Points of Intervention

Planning Group

- Assign roles to people best suited to a task. Determine where expertise is necessary. Who will facilitate a meeting with the planning group? Who will present data to the planning group?
- Broaden your horizon. Assure a representative planning group with people from various backgrounds particularly those who can contribute to a discussion about the upstream causes or risk factors for the problem or interest, and possible interventions related to those causes. Include representatives who can give insights about those actually experiencing the problem.
- Suggested script for introducing the problem analysis process to your planning group:
“Our MCH program has prioritized XX health issues based on data/information from our Title V Needs Assessment report completed last year. We believe that addressing social determinants of health as well as community issues and person level issues across the lifecourse must be part of our strategy for improving health outcome and that by partnering with all of you we can identify those factors that have the biggest impact in our community and begin to address them. To help structure our input we would like your help to diagram each of our identified priority health problems. This diagram is intended to present a picture of the problem as we see it in our community. It provides a simple way to explain our best conclusions as to the causes of and risk factors associated with the problem in our community. It is also intended to present a more comprehensive understanding of how larger societal, local community and individual characteristics interact in creating the problem. The process also requires that we define the short or long term consequences of not intervening. We think that this understanding will help us to develop rational strategies, realistic objectives and evaluation measures that will reflect the impact of our strategies.”

Problem Analysis/Diagram Development

- Turn the problem into a clear statement. Instead of placing “Breastfeeding” in the target indicator/problem area of the diagram, state “Mothers choose not to continue breastfeeding.” Try to be as specific as possible.
- Use the correct levels of the diagram for your precursors. Using the correct levels will assist in a useful problem analysis. The levels help in identifying whether and how the factors are related to each other.

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What do the three levels include? The three levels reflect different domains that can impact an individual.

1. The first level includes factors relevant to the particular individual or group of individuals with the identified problem, e.g., genetic factors, biological factors and personal behaviors that are directly or indirectly related to the identified problem.
2. The second level includes factors in the family/household or community and institutions in which the individual(s) resides, that affect the individual or are related to individual level factors e.g. family poverty, poor quality schools, and inadequate health resources. This represents peoples direct daily experiences, resources and contacts
3. The third level includes larger societal factors that have a more global affect on the health and well-being of anyone exposed to their effects e.g. social or economic factors at the state or national level, policies or attitudes. These factors have large effects on the distribution of conditions in level two.

Can the same factor be active at more than one level?

Yes, depending on whether your planning group thinks that there are ways to intervene at the local level, e.g., there may be lack of a national policy on universal health insurance for children but county or city action can be initiated to redirect local funds to provide insurance. In the latter case, lack of insurance can be a factor at both the local institution level and the societal level.

How are the levels useful?

The levels can assist in identifying whether and how factors relate to one another. This in turn helps us to make decision about where to intervene, i.e., directly with the affected individuals, with the family or local institutions or through policy or legislative action at the state or national level.

To determine causal pathways answer the question, “How do these factors relate to one another and the problem statement?” Place your causal pathways on the diagram or use separate sheets to draw pathways. Once a pathway is visualized, it presents possibilities for interventions.

Causal Pathway Mapping

How are decisions made about those causal pathway(s) in which to intervene and best intervention strategies(s)?

This is the time to consider findings from the peer review literature, risk analysis and local input, such as special population concerns or resource availability.

- Use literature reviews, survey results, interviews with experts and relevant data to assess the information presented in the diagram so far.
- Know your county resources/look at your capacity assessment – Who is currently working in a particular area of concern? Who can influence this

problem? What agencies, individuals and financial resources can be mobilized as partners in this effort? How many intervention pathways can you impact? In larger counties or those with more resources or where collaborations are able to tap multiple resources, more than one pathway and/or several points of interventions can be addressed.

- Is there an evidence based strategy and associated intervention(s)
- When focusing upstream on SES and policy issues consider a strategy where intervening may impact more than one health outcome and therefore be preferable to a strategy that only impacts one health outcome
- What is the time frame for achieving a particular effect
- Be sure to keep a record of the factors used in intervention decision-making so that you can summarize the process and supporting factors in your Action Plan Report.

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