

APPENDIX II-A

PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATORS AND THEIR USE

Public Health Indicators are precisely defined, standardized, quantifiable measures of a population's health risks, health status, health care access or health care utilization.

All indicators must have a precise definition of *what* is measured and must identify a numerator and denominator and a data source for each. Standardized indicators are used for community assessment, ongoing monitoring and assurance. They allow for meaningful comparisons over time and across population subgroups and geographic areas. They can be compared with state and national benchmarks such as *Healthy People 2010 Objectives*.

Indicators are often organized by domains. Domains are organizational constructs or categories by which indicators may be grouped. In many cases these are subcategories of health such as mortality, chronic disease, communicable disease or reproductive health. They can also be categorized more broadly, for example, into the categories of health, economic status, educational status and mental health.

Public health agencies use indicators to:

- Describe the population's demographic characteristics that are related to health status
- Describe the health status of the population
- Describe the health delivery system in a community
- Identify unmet health needs
- Identify special need or risk groups overall and for specific indicators
- Identify community or individual assets associated with improved health status or outcomes
- Identify areas of service deficiency, particularly as they impact low-income or special need populations
- Evaluate the impact of changes in structural characteristics of the health care system
- Assess the impact of health and economic policies that impact access to preventive or primary care
- Establish benchmarks to allow comparison of local community health and well being status with state and national benchmarks (e.g., *Healthy People 2010 objectives*)
- Monitor the effectiveness of intervention programs aimed at reducing particular deficiencies and needs identified through indicator-based assessment
- Inform policy makers who are deliberating health policies and allocation of resources

Health indicators are usually presented by looking at data on health risks, health status or outcomes and community health systems. Maternal Child Health (MCH) indicators are a subset of the more general community health indicators and are specifically related to the health status and health care of women, children and their families.

Generally, an initial community assessment is broad in scope, such that it provides a health profile of the community that includes a great variety of indicators. However, conducting a community assessment is resource intensive and therefore is not feasible to be conducted annually. Therefore, a smaller subset of indicators from the needs assessment phase is often selected for ongoing program tracking, surveillance (monitoring) and annual reporting.