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Practicum Site: Tennessee Department of Health

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Strengthening Tennessee Communities: Insights from the Office of Strategic Initiatives



Introduction: This practicum at the Tennessee Department of Health's Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) focused on advancing public health by bridging evidence-based strategies and resources with statewide needs. Key projects included 1) the Health Resiliency Program (HRP), which awards grants to expand healthcare capacity, invest in technology, and improve access to health across the state, and 2) the Tennessee Vitality Toolkit (TVT), a resource for County Health Councils to enhance community well-being.

Methods: For the Health Resiliency Program (HRP), a survey was distributed to gather in-depth data from grantees on their current projects. The Tennessee Vitality Toolkit (TVT) included research on how to improve the health and well-being of a community, interviews with local leaders about real-life examples of integrating programs into Tennessee spaces to improve well-being, and data visualizations that highlight important disparities in Tennessee. Issues such as post-partum depression and lack of care in rural areas, were paired with policies, programs, and collaborative actions that can address these issues and improve the lives of moms and babies in Tennessee. The TVT training tool deck was redesigned to be more aesthetically engaging while personalizing the Health Council experience.

Results: A new report will analyze and cover insights on the HRP program's effectiveness. A local hospital visit with the TDH commissioner was planned for September to learn more about capital investments in the hospital sector. The research on improving community well-being was converted into an evidence-based resource for Health Councils to explore what actions can address community health disparities and enhance well-being. The redesigned training deck was piloted for feedback, with plans for continued promotion through Health Council training sessions.

Conclusions: On a state and local level, this practicum with OSI deepened my understanding of community-driven initiatives that address pressing health issues in Tennessee. The projects strengthened public health practices by bridging strategic investment with community needs and enhancing tools and resources for Tennessee Health Councils. We learned that continuously refining data, while it is sometimes a tedious task, ensures that OSI shares updated, evidence-based data regularly. The data visualization projects were a reminder that storytelling can help effectively spread public health awareness.