

Faced with a Technological Obstacle, Republic of Palau Ministry of Health Takes Creative Approach to Gathering Community Health Assessment Feedback

When Palau's Ministry of Health (MOH) faced technology challenges to provide community access to its community health assessment (CHA) and gain feedback, it found an innovative way to engage the community.

The Public Health Accreditation Board [requires](#) nationally accredited health agencies to “document that the preliminary findings of the state-level [CHA] were distributed to the population at large and that their input was sought.” Some state health agencies are seeking the public’s input by publishing their CHAs on their websites, along with a website comment form allowing the public to leave feedback. Other health agencies have to find alternate ways to share their CHAs for public feedback due to technological limitations.

After completing a CHA, Palau’s MOH was faced with a technology challenge: without a website, it didn’t have a platform to allow the public access to the assessment. However, the MOH did not let this obstacle stop it from disseminating the CHA to the public, and found another venue to gather community input.

Steps Taken:

- While attending a National Public Health Improvement Initiative West Symposium in September 2013, Palau MOH Accreditation Coordinator Inger Appanaitis learned that a local health department had solicited public feedback for its CHA during a county fair. Inspired by this creative approach, Appanaitis and the Palau MOH accreditation team brainstormed to identify a similar opportunity in Palau.
- The team decided that Palau’s MOH could use the local International Night Markets as venues to capture community feedback on the CHA. The International Night Markets are bimonthly events held in a central square, where local restaurants, musicians, and other vendors and artists present or sell their work. Because these events are popular with locals and attract different age groups and ethnicities, the team determined that seeking feedback at International Night Markets would provide a good representation of the community.
- Appanaitis worked with Palau’s Visitors Authority, which runs the markets, to set up a booth during two International Night Markets in August 2014. During these events, the CHA was displayed for community members on a poster or brochure, allowing them to review it and vote on top health priorities in Palau.
- Despite not having online access to gather input from the community on Palau’s CHA, the MOH received 180 community member responses on top health priorities for Palau during these two events.
- In addition to the night markets, the MOH presented the CHA at the Annual Palau Ministry of Education Conference, where 10 teachers provided input on health priorities for school-age

- The Republic of Palau Ministry of Health used the territory’s International Night Market to reach community members for CHA feedback.
- The ministry received 180 votes on different top priorities in Palau during International Night Markets.

children. For example, one teacher asked about statistics on drug use among students because the CHA only included data on smoking and alcohol. The teacher suggested including 'other drug' use among students because it was on the rise in Palau. The MOH then used data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to update its CHA to reflect the teacher's important suggestion.

Lessons Learned:

- The Palau MOH team noticed that the results of the second International Night Market appeared to be influenced by the placement of the indicators on the voting chart. For instance, during the first night market, diabetes received five votes where it was placed towards the bottom. During the second night market, diabetes was placed toward the top of the voting chart and received 18 votes.
- The way MOH posed questions to community members may have influenced how they interpreted them and thus, how they voted. For example, a community member suggested including more "healthy priorities" with positive language, such as having an option for "healthy eating" instead of listing obesity, which may sound more negative.
- It's important to include the community as a health agency is determining its priorities. After MOH set the current Palau health priorities, it discussed them with the community and found that some of the priorities within the community were different from MOH's. However, reducing the burden of noncommunicable diseases was a priority for both MOH and the community.
- As the MOH prepares for upcoming International Night Markets, the team is looking forward to improving its set-up and engaging the community for ideas on community assets. After the first night market, the MOH modified its voting chart by omitting vague indicators, such as "reducing injuries," and adding indicators it needed more data on, like household water quality.

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