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Practicum Site: Tennessee Department of Health, Office of Strategic Initiatives

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A Toolkit to Spanish-Speaking Populations in Tennessee Communities



Introduction: This practicum was based in the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) at the Tennessee Department of Health (TDH). Tennessee is home to over 350,000 Hispanic or Latinx residents and over 250,000 Spanish-speakers. Access to quality and affordable healthcare has been shown to lead to improved health outcomes leading to stark disparities and fundamental barriers that the Hispanic/Latinx and Spanish-speaking population faces in Tennessee. Every county in Tennessee has a County Health Council (CHC) that is responsible for conducting a Community Health Assessment (CHA) to determine and develop action plans that address community public health issues. Therefore, the goal of my practicum was to develop a toolkit for CHCs to utilize during their CHA process that will help them to be more equity minded and engage a population in their community they may not know had existed and/or how to involve, as well as translate existing public-facing CHA worksheets into Spanish as another resource to help CHCs take small actionable steps towards improving health outcomes for the Hispanic/Latinx and Spanish-Speaking communities in their county.

Methods: To develop the toolkit an extensive review of current literature and resources on engaging the Spanish-Speaking and Hispanic/Latinx communities in public health initiatives was conducted. Feedback from colleagues on the OSI team was utilized to improve accessibility of the toolkit and ensure that it was effective and comprehensive in its content.

Results: The toolkit contains the latest data on health disparities faced by Spanish-Speaking and Hispanic/Latinx Tennesseans, an interactive map highlighting where Spanish-Speakers live across the state, CHA specific action items CHCs can take, strategies for broader community action, as well as a list of partner organizations across the state that work with these communities and a list of free translation resources. OSI plans to distribute this toolkit to all CHCs in the upcoming cohort, and all translated CHA worksheets will be provided on TDH's public-facing website.

Conclusions: CHCs can increase awareness about and facilitate impactful actions to address health issues that the Spanish-Speaking and Hispanic/Latinx communities are facing across the state. This practicum allowed the opportunity to create avenues for local communities to think about incorporating health equity into their work, as well as provided resources to take specific, actionable steps towards addressing health disparities faced by members of their communities in their CHA process and more broadly.