Project Name

Evaluation of Health Department's Contact Tracing program
21-340-01-Contact-Tracing

Rapid Response Evaluation: It is estimated this evaluation will be completed within 90 to 100 days from the date of the entrance conference, which took place on October 1, 2020.

Project Background

Contact tracing is an epidemiological process of gathering and disseminating data and information to public health officials with the intent to slow the spread of infectious diseases.

While the term and process may be new to many people due to the SARS-Cov-2 (COVID-19) outbreak, the contact tracing process has been developed and refined over the past 165 years. Contact tracing has been used to stem outbreaks of Ebola, cholera, venereal diseases, and the near eradication of smallpox in the 1980's. Prior to COVID-19, the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) used contact tracing for the statewide mumps outbreak of 2016-2017.

Contact tracing is most effective when used in conjunction with a vaccine. In the absence of a vaccine, a "non-pharmaceutical intervention" is implemented. This intervention essentially uses data and information from the contact tracing process to inform people of the necessity to self-isolate and/or quarantine to limit the spread of infection. The de-identified data and information gathered by case investigators and contact tracers during the contact tracing process is ideally distributed to governing leadership to ensure efficient, effective allocation of resources and appropriate evidence to enact additional policies, procedures, or mandates to assist in mitigating any observed spike in outbreaks.

Original Scope and Project Description

Project Description: Examine the impact of Federal COVID funds on state health programs; examine outcomes of the Oklahoma State Department of Health's (OSDH) contact tracing program for COVID active infections.

Scope of Work: (1) Evaluate efficiency and outcomes of contact tracers related to limiting the spread of COVID and (2) Evaluate categories of reimbursement funds, approval processes, and compliance with Federal reimbursement policy.

Material Findings from Entrance Conference

OSDH's leadership team for the contact tracing program provided insight into the struggles and efforts to fully implement a contact tracing program of this magnitude. One of the biggest challenges is the Public Health Investigation and Disease Detection of Oklahoma (PHIDDO) system, which was never designed to handle the case load observed by the COVID pandemic. OSDH reports progress in improving PHIDDO to be better equipped to handle case load management until the system is replaced by the Google MTX program. Purchased with CARES Funds, the Google platform is expected to be fully operational November 2020. Another material finding is that the contact tracing programs in Oklahoma and Tulsa County do not fall within the State's contact tracing program, though information is shared through the PHIDDO system. Lastly, OSDH is using a FEMA program to help offset COVID costs, which will allow the department to burden the cost of the contact tracing program throughout the pandemic.

Evaluation Objectives

Based on the LOFT evaluation team's prework, this evaluation seeks to:

1. Obtain and analyze output and outcome metrics to determine the effectiveness of the OSDH contact tracing program, including critical decision points within the implementation and reporting process
2. Examine cost savings and offsets identified by OSDH which will be used to shoulder the ongoing costs of the contact tracing program
3. Examine the policies, procedures, mandates, and statutes used, or which can be used, to better enhance project objectives and goals
4. Further examine OSDH's CARES Fund expenditures to ensure compliance and transparency