Community Engagement Institute
Wichita State University

2024 Kansas Local Public Health Department Informatics Survey Executive Summary

The purpose of the 2024 Kansas Local Public Health Informatics Survey is to provide a comprehensive assessment of the current state of informatics capacities within Kansas local health departments. It aims to evaluate and gain a stronger understanding of public health informatics system capabilities, including infrastructure, software applications, data management practices, and interoperability. It also assesses existing workforce skills, competencies, and available resources. By identifying gaps and areas for improvement in both informatics capacities and system capabilities, the survey seeks to result in the development of strategic guidance for informatics improvements in the Kansas local public health system.

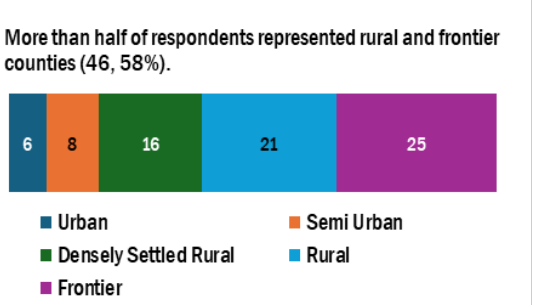
The **Public Health Informatics Institute** defines public health informatics as the science of how to use data, information and knowledge to improve human health and the delivery of health care services.

Why It Matters

Almost every aspect of public health practice involves the use of data. Although informatics is not a commonly used term, much of the work done by Kansas public health workforce is related to informatics. The world is changing rapidly when it comes to the creation and use of data- technology is expanding to make data use and management both easier and more complex at the same time. In order to serve the public's needs and in achieving optimal health and well-being for Kansans, local and state public health must forge a path to embrace the opportunities informatics provides.

What Was Completed

The assessment survey was initiated by the Kansas Association for Local Health Department (KALHD) Informatics Subcommittee. It was compiled from several sources and administered by Wichita State University's Center for Public Health Initiatives (WSU CPHI). The survey was sent by KALHD to local health department administrators on February 2, 2024, and concluded on February 29, 2024. Eighty local health departments from across the state responded. CPHI then analyzed results by population density. A full report can be accessed at https://kphcollaborative.org/publichealthinformatics/.



Key Findings

After review and analysis of the report's findings, several key findings were identified.

- Health department EHR adoption and use varies greatly, with a large amount of health departments continuing to utilize multiple methods for data collection, storage and reporting. This includes the common use of paper records, even for health departments with EHRs. Rural, frontier and densely-settled rural counties are less likely to use EHRs. Health departments with EHRs continue to utilize many systems, indicating challenges with system interoperability and duplication of effort.

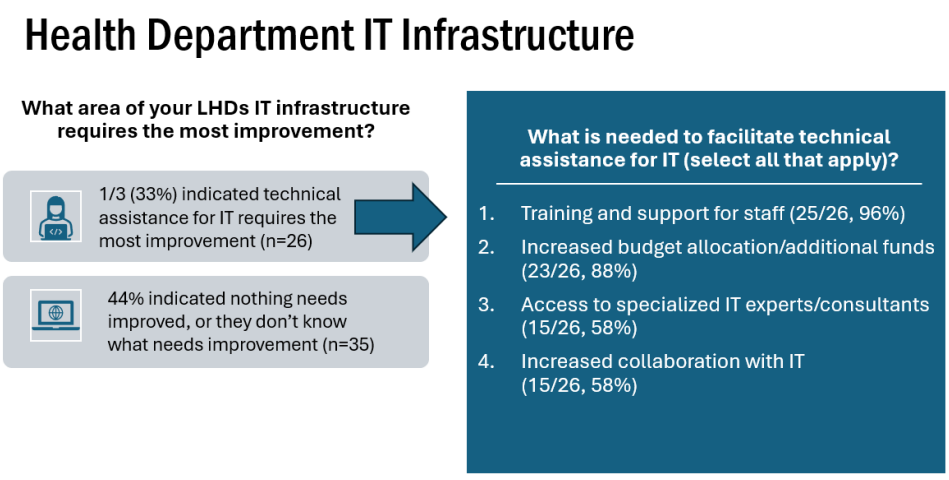
- Health departments face challenges in integrating data from different sources or systems. The top three challenges they face are:
  - Limited staff expertise (55%)
  - Technology complexity (35%)
  - Infrastructure limitations (26%)

- There is opportunity for enhanced data sharing between health departments and the health care system through increased usage of health information exchange. Approximately three quarters of health departments surveyed do not utilize KHIN, the leading state health information exchange.
    - Among health departments that do not use KHIN, 76% indicated that they don't know what KHIN is or don't know enough about it. Most of these LHDs represent frontier and rural counties (n=32, 55%).
    - Among those who do, almost all use it to look up patient information (95%, n=21). 41% of these LHDs use KHIN exclusively for this purpose (n=9).
    - Twenty five percent of health departments reported that they lack the capability to securely exchange electronic data, while only nine reported using health information exchanges (HIEs) for specific data-sharing needs. HIEs are particularly utilized in both urban and rural areas.

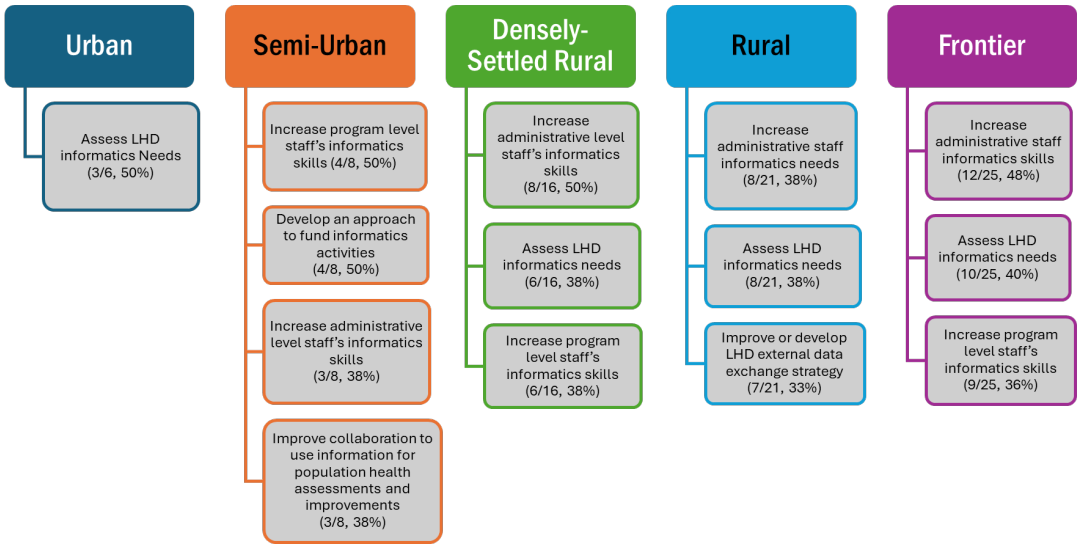
- Local Health Departments identified many shared gaps in data management practices. The top gaps identified are in the following areas:
    - Utilizing data to address community needs or issues (18% of health departments)
        - Additionally, only 24% of health departments reporting ongoing, formalized collaborative relationships with community partners to use data for population health assessment and improvement
    - Data analysis capacity (17% of health departments)
    - Sharing data with external partners (15% of health departments)
    - Internal system interoperability (11% of health departments)

- Local Health Departments also share common gaps for data security and compliance concerns:
    - Vulnerability to cyber attacks
    - Lack of encryption
    - Regulatory changes impacting compliance
    - Data breaches

- Health Department IT Infrastructure faces many challenges



- There is strong overlap in areas that LHDs would like informatics support in over the next three years



  - Responses on specific training opportunities that are offered to health department staff on a variety of data skills also indicate significant gaps across various data-related areas within health departments, particularly in frontier and rural regions.

- Local Health Departments would like support improving informatics skills and systems capabilities through:
  - Specialized training workshops or courses
  - External collaboration for specialized guidance
  - Guidance for ongoing technology upgrades and advancements

After analyzing the report findings, ten key priorities of potential focus were identified. These ten areas represent opportunities to advance the Kansas Local Public Health system's informatics capacity.

1. Standardize EHR Usage
2. Improve interoperability/reduce dual data entry
3. Increase Staff Informatics Expertise
4. Maximize the use of Health Information Exchange (KHIN)
5. Enhance LHD ability to address community needs
6. Increase LHD data analysis capacity
7. Decrease vulnerability to cyber attacks
8. Improve technical assistance for IT
9. Advance informatics skills and system capabilities through specialized training workshops/courses
10. Support further assessment of local health departments' specific informatics needs

Next Steps

This assessment allows health departments and other Kansas local public health system partners to identify what is needed to make strategic progress towards a more robust informatics environment. Kansas health departments recognize the need to leverage systems and technology to fulfill their role in protecting the public's health.

The team at WSU CPHI will use the assessment results outlined in this report to partner with local health department leaders and informatics staff and develop a roadmap for informatics improvements for the local public health system. The roadmap will be a strategy-level document outlining target milestones for local health departments in Kansas based, with a recognition that counties of different population densities have varying needs and resources. The roadmap will narrow the list of potential priority strategy areas, identify a desired future state for Kansas public health informatics and outline desired end goals. Alignment at the local and state level through a shared roadmap will allow stronger advancement over the next three to five years.

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