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Practicum Site: Tennessee Department of Health

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My Time with the Office of Strategic Initiatives

Introduction: The Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) bridges evidence-based strategies and resources of TDH with local knowledge, priorities, and leadership. OSI's work focuses on three areas: 1. Helping guide the strategic planning process; 2. Supporting County Health Councils to implement upstream, innovative solutions to current public health challenges their communities face; and 3. Support and work on special projects for the commissioner. My goal working with OSI was to gain a deeper understanding of how a state health department works and obtain experience and expertise from those working in the field.

Methods: Engagement with OSI allowed me to work on a variety of projects. The primary task was the Tennessee Vitality toolkit (TVT), where I created white papers and website language on key focus areas, including access to care, mental wellness, and community safety. I developed a document that organized and prioritized the Health Resiliency Plan (HRP) Letters of Support documents.

Results: The TVT provides County Health Councils with evidence-based action steps, support, and resources. Creating the white papers provided the necessary information to create various materials for county health councils to utilize while having a solid internal document available. The papers were further distilled into website language that is accessible and provides upstream-thinking solutions to address critical public health issues. The HRP letters of support document supported the process of determining the grantees for the second round of funding.

Conclusions: The TVT provides County Health Councils with critical information surrounding public health issues their counties face while providing them with more upstream thinking approaches. The TVT alone isn't enough to help address the problems their counties face, but it's an excellent first step. Working with OSI allowed me to understand that even while focused on the state level, you can have an impact at the county level.

