

Updating the Priority Research Questions

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The WPHRN PRQ 2015 Update supports the network's purpose of "Linking public health practitioners and researchers to answer questions and disseminate discoveries that can be applied to improve practice and population health."

PRQ Categories

1. Public health services and interventions
2. Organization and structure of public health departments
3. Finance
4. Workforce
5. Laws and Policies
6. Partnership strategies for health improvement
7. Public health and related systems

New PRQ recommended by public health practitioners point to a need for more research on the efficient use of resources, workforce competency, public health nurses roles, and environmental concerns

In 2011, the WPHRN created a list of 75 priority research questions (PRQ), grouped in seven categories. The PRQ are used to guide researchers and practitioners to conduct public health services and systems research (PHSSR) in areas that are relevant and important to public health practice in Wisconsin. The PRQ are also used by the WPHRN Steering Committee as one factor to consider when making decisions about research projects the network will support or endorse.

The WPHRN PRQ were updated in August 2015. The purpose of the update was to provide a more current list of PRQ for researchers to use when planning research projects to reflect areas of importance for public health practice in Wisconsin. This brief describes the process and results of the update.

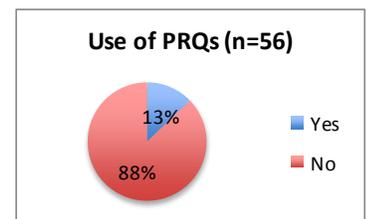
Methods

WPHRN members (n=163) were invited to share their perspectives on the relevance and importance of the original set of PRQ from 2011 and to suggest new priority research questions through an online survey developed by interns and WPHRN staff under the guidance of Professor Susan Zahner, UW-Madison. Member responses were requested via email with an embedded link to the survey administered between 2/27/2015 and 3/25/2015. Two email reminders were sent to encourage participation.

Survey questions solicited information about 1) How WPHRN members use the PRQ ; 2) Which PRQ categories are of greater priority for improving public health services in Wisconsin (Ranked from 1=highest to 7 = lowest); 3) Which PRQ identified in 2011 are still relevant to public health practice in 2015, and 4) What new questions should be added for 2015. Respondents were asked to indicate a priority level (low, medium, or high) for each question they considered still relevant. Questions identified as relevant by at least 55% of the respondents and given a medium or high priority rating by at least 50% of respondents were included in the final 2015 PRQ list. New questions were added to PRQ categories with-out modifications, with modifications for clarity, or were incorporated into similar questions from the 2011 version.

Results

Respondents: Fifty-seven WPHRN members responded to the survey (35% response rate). Respondents self-identified (n=56) as a PH practitioner (63%), a PH researcher (16%), both a PH practitioner and PH researcher (5%), a student (5%), or indicated other (11%).



Use of PRQ: A small percentage of respondents (n=7) indicated that they had used the 2011 PRQ to guide public health practice, research or systems improvement. Reported uses of the PRQ included: 1) "Improve existing shared services," 2) "Considered when talking with

students and looking at potential grant projects,” 3) “I’ve shared it with some of my academic partners,” 4) “Review and consider when programs are being updated or eliminated,” 5) “Wrote grant to attempt to address one of the PRQs,” and 6) “When reviewing funding opportunities.”

Rank of PRQ categories: The highest ranked category was *Public health services and interventions* (mean rank=2.11) and the lowest was *Public Health and related systems* (mean rank=5.19). Table 1 displays the categories in order of highest to lowest mean rank.

PRQ relevance and prioritization: Sixty-three of 75 original 2011 PRQ were still considered relevant by at least 55% of the respondents. PRQ within categories were unable to be prioritized due to considerable response variation.

2011 PRQ included in the update: Sixty-two of the 2011 original PRQ (83%, n=75) were identified as still being relevant by 55% or more of the respondents and were given a medium or high priority by at least 50% of respondents. These 62 questions were included in the 2015 update.

New PRQ: Fifty-one suggestions for new PRQ were submitted by respondents. After modification, 47 new PRQ were added to the 2015 update which included a total of 109 questions.

Discussion

- This survey elicited information from only 35% of WPHRN members. It is possible that using series of shorter surveys focused on one PRQ category at a time would have generated a higher response rate.
- Only WPHRN members were invited to participate in the survey. It is possible that questions relevant to improving public health practice were missed since WPHRN membership includes a small fraction of Wisconsin’s public health practitioners.
- The low percent (13%) of WPHRN members who reported using the PRQ may reflect the fact that more than half of members joined since 2014 and thus may not have had time to use them.
- Thirteen of the 2011 PRQ were not included in the update. No information was collected as to why a question was no longer relevant or was selected at a particular priority level.
- The extent to which the WPHRN PRQ have already been answered is unknown. A literature review for each PRQ category area has not been done. This gap in knowledge

Table 1. Number of PRQ Removed, Modified, and Added

PRQ Category	2011 PRQ	Removed 2011 PRQ	Modified 2011 PRQ	New PRQ	2015 PRQ
Public health services and interventions (mean rank=2.11)	18	1	0	5	22
Partnership strategies for health improvement (mean rank=3.85)	5	1	0	5	9
Finance (mean rank=3.91)	4	0	0	9	13
Organization and structure of public health departments (mean rank=4.21)	20	4	0	4	20
Workforce (mean rank=4.34)	13	3	0	9	19
Laws and policies (mean rank=4.38)	10	3	1	10	17
Public health and related systems (mean rank=5.19)	5	1	1	5	9
Total	75	13	2	47	109

may have affected the questions that were selected for the update.

- Several new PRQ suggested by respondents were from the areas of *Finance*, *Workforce* and *Laws and policies*. New PRQ have raised awareness about the need to focus research on the efficient use of resources, workforce competency levels, public health nurses in the workforce, and environmental concerns.

Conclusions

- Funding for PHSSR is limited. PH researchers should focus their research on questions of relevance and importance to public health practice.
- There is no shortage of research questions to explore.
- The WPHRN PRQ is the only known list of research questions that addresses PHSSR in Wisconsin.
- The WPHRN PRQ 2015 Update reflects current research needs to improve public health practice in Wisconsin.

To view the list of updated PRQ and the full project report:
<http://www.wphrn.org/wisconsin-research-questions.html>

For more information or to join the Wisconsin Public Health Research Network, please visit www.wphrn.org