Local health departments (LHDs) are increasingly using national standards to meet the challenges presented by the complex environments in which these agencies operate. Local boards of health (LBoHs) might play an instrumental role in improving LHDs’ engagement in activities to meet these standards.

This study assessed the impact of LBoH performance of governance functions on LHDs having a current community health assessment (CHA), community health improvement plan (CHIP), strategic plan, and level of engagement in the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) accreditation program. Binary and multinomial logistic regression models were used to analyze linked data from 329 LHDs participating in both the 2015 Local Board of Health Survey and the 2016 National Profile of LHDs Survey.

The higher performance of LBoH governance functions, measured by an overall scale of LBoH taxonomy consisting of 60 items, had a significant positive effect on LHDs having completed CHA (P < .001), CHIP (P = .01), and strategic plan (P < .001). LHDs operating in communities with a higher score on the overall scale of LBoH taxonomy had significantly higher odds (P = .03) of having higher level of participation in the PHAB national voluntary accreditation program—that is, being accredited, having submitted application for accreditation, or being in the e-PHAB system (e.g., by submitting a letter of intent).

In conclusion, LBoHs serve as governance bodies for roughly 71% of LHDs and can play a significant role in encouraging LHDs’ participation in these practices. That positive influence of LBoHs can be seen more clearly if the complexity and richness of LBoH governance functions and other characteristics are measured appropriately. The study findings suggest that LBoHs are a significant component of the public health system in the United States, having a positive influence on LHDs having a CHA, CHIP, strategic plan, and participation in accreditation.

"Impact of Local Boards of Health on Local Health Department Accreditation, Community Health Assessment, Community Health Improvement Planning, and Strategic Planning." was recently published in the Journal of Public Health Management & Practice.

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Posted in Department News, JPHCOPH
New administrator appointments in Georgia Southern’s Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health

September 14, 2018

Georgia Southern University’s Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health (JPHCOPH) is pleased to announce that Joseph Telfair, DrPH, has been appointed associate dean for Practice and Research and Gulzar Shah, Ph.D., MStat, MS, has been appointed chair of the Department of Health Policy and Community Health.

“I am very excited about these appointments,” said JPHCOPH Dean Greg Evans. “They should help us better serve our students and move to the next level of recognition in both the University system and among other schools of public health.”

As the Karl E. Peace Distinguished Chair of Public Health, Telfair brings more than 32 years of international experience as a clinician, community advocate, academic, researcher and academic administrator. He is widely known for his focus on practice-based, evidence-driven public health in the areas of social work, social epidemiology, cultural and linguistic competency, public health genetics, elimination of health inequities, disparities and systemic poverty, community-based and rural public health practice, program evaluation, and policy issues concerning women, adolescents and persons in underserved areas.

He has been a public health faculty member and leader in three schools of public health for nearly 26 years. In addition, he has been a principal investigator, co-principal investigator, co-director or director of a number of Health Resources and Services Administration, National Institutes of Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, foundation and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded training, evaluation or research programs, and applied research and coordinating centers.

As the 2017-18 president of the American Public Health Association, Telfair takes a leader-as-servant approach, believing leadership is a unique and privileged opportunity to serve. He holds a master of social work and master of public health from the University of California at Berkeley and a DrPH from Johns Hopkins University.

Shah is a prolific researcher who won Georgia Southern’s 2016 Award for Excellence in Research. He has interdisciplinary training and his multi-sector work experience spans over 19 years, with national and international appointments in academia and public health practice agencies. Prior to joining JPHCOPH, he was the lead research scientist at the National Association of County and City Health Departments and the director of research at the National Association of Health Data Organization. He also served at the Utah State Department of Health for six years, contributing significantly to patient safety and informatics projects, and maternal and child health and systems research. Shah’s research interests include data improvement; practice-based public health services and systems research; eHealth and public health informatics; and public health finances. He earned a Ph.D. in sociology with emphasis on demography and sociology of health from Utah State University.

The JPHCOPH recently launched two new degree programs — bachelor of science in public health and master of public health — on the Armstrong Campus. These programs join the BSPH, MPH and DrPH programs on the Statesboro campus, continuing to build a premier program as an accredited public health college at Georgia Southern. The mission of the JPHCOPH is to improve health, eliminate health disparities and health inequities of rural communities and underserved populations globally through excellence in teaching, public health workforce development, research, scholarship, professional service and community engagement.