

# ASSESSING CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABILITY in Local Health Departments

Sustainability has been defined as the **existence of structures and processes** that allow a program to leverage resources to effectively implement and maintain evidence-based public health. It is important in local health departments (LHDs) to retain the benefits of effective programs. The Sustainability Framework, which includes 8 domains, is a useful tool for assessing public health program capacity for sustainability among LHDs.



This qualitative study aimed to explore what factors contribute to the sustained use of evidence-based programs and policies in high-capacity and low-capacity LHDs.

- 35 interviews with LHD directors and management team
- 6 geographically dispersed LHDs, 3 of low and 3 of high capacity

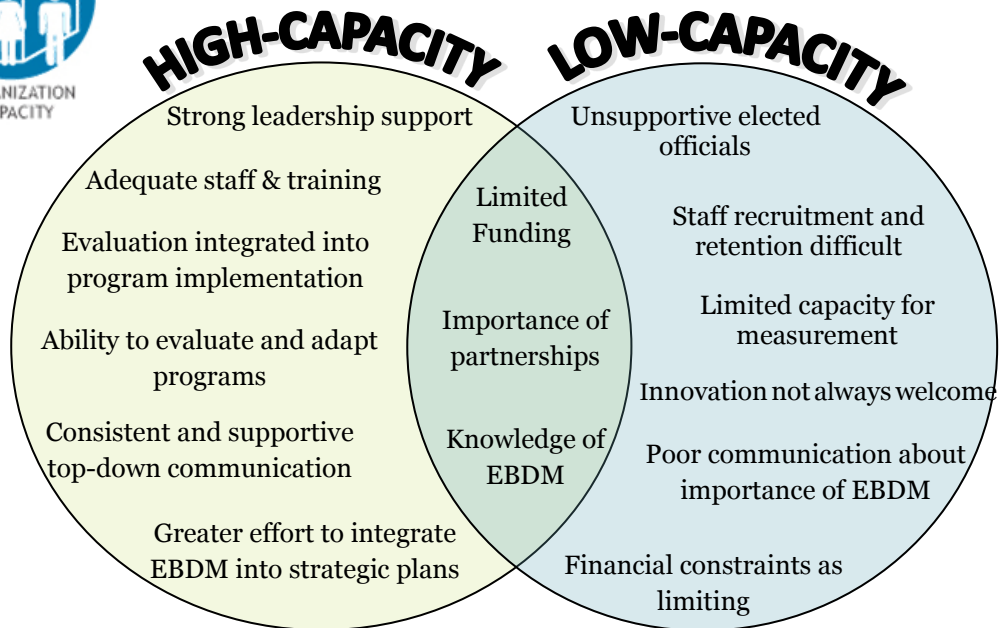
It was expected that high-capacity LHDs were more likely to have leadership and organizational culture and climates that were supportive of evidence-based practices.

### LHD capacity was based on:

- Administrative evidence-based process scores
- National Public Health Performance Standards Scores

### Evidence-based decision making (EBDM)

is a process that involves making decisions on the basis of the best available evidence, applying program planning and quality improvement frameworks, engaging the community in assessment and decision-making, and conducting sound evaluation.



## FINDINGS

**Leadership support** is important because leaders have the ability to affect the adoption of EBDM in their LHDs directly through **resource allocation** (human & material), and indirectly through **encouragement, support, and mentorship**.

Strengthening **communication** and **program evaluation** within a LHD would help to build an internal agency culture that research suggests would be **more resilient** to external conflicts, like funding instability or complicated political environments.