

Substance Abuse Epidemiology

The proposed assignment will be in the Substance Abuse Epidemiology Unit (SAEU) of the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH). The SAEU is part of the Injury and Behavioral Epidemiology Bureau of the Epidemiology and Response Division (ERD) of the NMDOH. The NMDOH SAEU has been in existence since the early 1990s and is one of the only epidemiology units within a U.S. state health department to have a sole focus on substance abuse and related issues.

The NMDOH SAEU currently consists of four epidemiologists, including a drug epidemiologist, an alcohol epidemiologist, a mental health epidemiologist, and a data linkage epidemiologist. These epidemiologists conduct public health surveillance and special studies related to New Mexico's significant substance abuse and mental health issues. Some current areas of special interest to SAEU epidemiologists include prescription drug overdose, chronic liver disease, associations between suicide and depression, and DWI recidivism.

Some recent SAEU New Mexico-specific publications include the prevalence of alcohol dependence among excessive drinkers, methadone and other prescription drug overdose death, and changing longitudinal trends in drug-caused death.

The SAEU also supports planning and decision-making related to substance abuse and mental health policy, legislation, and prevention programming, both within the NMDOH and working with other state agencies and non-governmental organizations. The SAEU epidemiologists work closely with the New Mexico Health Services Department to support the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grant. They also work with the NMDOH Office of Substance Abuse Prevention to support NMDOH's Strategic Prevention Framework-State Incentive Grant (SPF-SIG) and the related State Epidemiology Workgroup. They participate in statewide planning and oversight bodies such as the Governor's DWI Leadership Team and substance-related task forces; and work closely with national entities such as the CDC and NIDA. The CSTE Fellow will have the opportunity to get involved with these activities and entities, and to gain perspective, experience, and understanding of substance abuse-related issues as they are discussed at the local, state, and national level.

The CSTE Fellow working in this program area will be able to choose from a range of projects, including:

- Conducting analytic studies in substance use and mental health epidemiology using sources such as administrative record-level datasets, hospitalization discharge data, surveys, medical examiner and vital records data; projects may include spatial analyses using GIS or data linkage if the Fellow has skills and interests in this area.
- Designing studies on substance use and mental health using primary data collection methods, conduct analyses and disseminate results.
- Participation in other ERD investigations and trainings, as time allows.

The CSTE Fellow's day-to-day activities will include planning and analytic work related to these projects, as well as meetings and interactions with the various agencies and organizations with which the SAEU collaborates. In addition to these activities within the SAEU, the Fellow will have the opportunity to work with epidemiologists in the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Bureau on one or more outbreak field investigations. The Fellow would develop skills in designing and administering questionnaires, generating epidemiologic curves, descriptive data analysis, and communicating with medical care providers, the Scientific Laboratory Division, and state and national agencies that commonly collaborate with the NMDOH during the course of an investigation. The Fellow would function as part of the team working to control the outbreak by recommending prevention and treatment measures. At the same time, the Fellow would develop skills in health risk communication, including the ability to interpret and communicate epidemiologic findings to the public.

As part of their role within NMDOH, the Fellow will also be able to participate in activities of the Bureau of Health Emergency Management, which oversees the State Emergency Preparedness Plan. The Fellow would have the opportunity to participate in table top exercises related to preparedness and spend time in the Department Operations Center or the state Emergency Operations Center should they be activated during the fellowship period.

Assignment Location:	Santa Fe, New Mexico
Primary Mentor:	Tierney Murphy, MD, MPH Behavioral Health Epidemiologist New Mexico Department of Health
Advanced Degrees:	MPH, Emory University (2003) MD, University of Massachusetts Medical School (1988)
Secondary Mentor:	Jim Roeber, MSPH Alcohol Epidemiologist Epidemiology and Response Division New Mexico Department of Health
Advanced Degrees:	MSPH, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (1985)