



CJS Case Report

Carson City and Douglas County in Nevada

Background

Carson City is a consolidated municipality and is the capital of Nevada. It sits adjacent to Douglas County in the northwest quadrant of the state. Both jurisdictions border Lake Tahoe to the west.

For many years, the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (the state health department) provided environmental health inspection services (for food establishments, public bathing places, schools and campgrounds) in Douglas County – and many other jurisdictions in the state. However, when the state announced it was going to charge for these services, Douglas County pursued a cross-jurisdictional sharing (CJS) arrangement with neighboring Carson City Health and Human Services (CCHHS) for all environmental health services. CCHHS had been conducting these services for a long time and had a great deal of expertise in this realm. Both parties agreed on the importance of cost savings and enhanced environmental health services for Douglas County, provided in a manner that was cost neutral for CCHHS. In addition, CCHHS felt the initiative would strengthen its operations and its ability to become a health district (should they decide to pursue this in the future).



**The effectiveness of the
environmental health program
has increased in
both jurisdictions as a
result of the partnership.**

Activities and Accomplishments

In 2013, CCHHS was awarded a grant from the Center for Sharing Public Health Services to plan and implement the CJS arrangement for environmental health services with Douglas County. They began the grant-funded effort by establishing a stakeholder group to oversee all CJS planning, preparation and implementation activities. The stakeholder group included elected officials and administrators from Carson City and Douglas County and the administrator and environmental health manager from the state. CCHHS also developed an operational and transition plan that included a detailed timeline, which was reviewed by the stakeholder group at each of their quarterly meetings. The stakeholder group successfully negotiated an interlocal agreement that outlined all legal components of the CJS arrangement. Significant effort was devoted to developing a mutually agreeable budget, specifically to ensure cost savings for Douglas County (relative to the new costs that would be charged by the state) and cost neutrality for Carson City.

A multifaceted communications plan was developed to support the planning and implementation of the arrangement. The communications plan included:

1. Use of a new logo for environmental health services that incorporates both the CCHHS logo and the Douglas County logo;

2. Updates at all CCHHS staff meetings;
3. Email to all Carson City and Douglas County government employees and letters to all Douglas County permit holders about the new arrangement; and
4. Discussions at Carson City Board of Health meetings and Douglas County Board of County Commissioners meetings.

As the plan neared implementation, Douglas County approved a new county code to reflect the policies of the CCHHS environmental health program. CCHHS made necessary accommodations to its information technology (IT) structure to accommodate a new billing structure, and trained staff on new software that would be used for billing purposes.

CCHHS successfully assumed the provision of environmental health services for Douglas County beginning on January 1, 2014. This arrangement provided Douglas County with an improved level of service and lower costs initially. In addition, the transition caused no service disruptions and customers have expressed a high level of satisfaction. The impact on the CCHHS environmental health program was cost-neutral, with the exception of minor administrative costs.

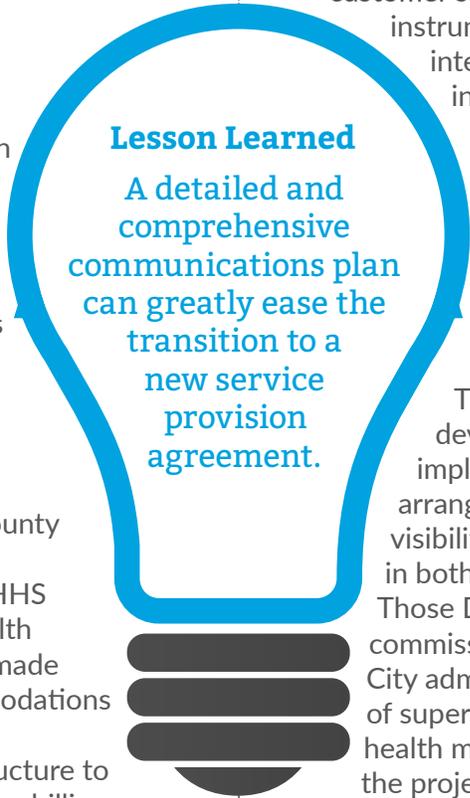
CCHHS also developed a [Nevada-specific toolkit](#) for developing CJS arrangements that could be useful in other states as well. It includes a copy of the interlocal agreement, logo, letters to staff and food establishment permit holders, customer satisfaction survey instrument, and an internal staff survey instrument. CCHHS held a meeting with other Nevada counties to share the toolkit, describe its contents and answer questions.

The process of developing and implementing this CJS arrangement raised the visibility of public health in both jurisdictions. Those Douglas County commissioners and Carson City administrators, board of supervisors and board of health members involved in the project have a greater investment in, understanding of, and commitment to public health services.

It is possible that CCHHS may provide additional services to Douglas and other counties in the future. For example, Storey County has requested that CCHHS explore the possibility of providing environmental health services in their county. In addition, some exploratory discussions are being held regarding the provision of other services.

Challenges

Gubernatorial approval was required for a county to provide



Lesson Learned
A detailed and comprehensive communications plan can greatly ease the transition to a new service provision agreement.

services that had previously been provided by the state. This was a somewhat complicated process, and approval was granted in June 2013. In the interim, in anticipation of the approval, the team carried out the activities outlined in the work plan.

In the planning process, it fell to the stakeholder group to fully understand how the somewhat complex state calculations would be applied to Douglas County. This information was central to ensuring cost savings for Douglas County, as it created a baseline for comparison.

Environmental health specialist recruitment proved to be difficult, as tends to be the case in this area. Despite recruiting for new staff during the planning phase in the hopes of having someone on board when the new agreement was launched, a specialist was not hired for several months after implementation of the CJS arrangement. This vacancy caused an initial backlog of inspections and a delay in implementation and testing of the inspection software in the new office location in Douglas County.

After implementation, CCHHS discovered that many of Douglas County's paper files were incomplete. They also learned that environmental health services impact other Douglas County public agencies as well, which necessitated adjustments to several process flows.

Early implementation activities were focused on billing issues, including the establishment of a consistent billing structure and moving from paper to

electronic records for Douglas County establishments. In addition, both entities worked to resolve IT network security issues to ensure smooth electronic communication.

Two Years Later

Since the grant ended, there have been several stakeholder changes in both counties, including the county manager in Douglas County (who is the former Carson City Manager), the social services manager who oversees nursing in Douglas County, and the health official in Carson City. This turnover in positions has not affected the CJS agreement in place.

Activities and Accomplishments

As a result of expanding its services to Douglas County, the CCHHS environmental health program has grown. It continues to operate smoothly in both jurisdictions.

New food standards have been implemented and the environmental health manager now has the capacity to pursue grant funding to assist in the program's transition to implementing these standards. Moreover, CCHHS also provides plan review and follow-up to complaints for the inspected establishments. In accordance with a statewide regulation for 2018, environmental health services for tattoo/body piercing establishments have been added to the mix.

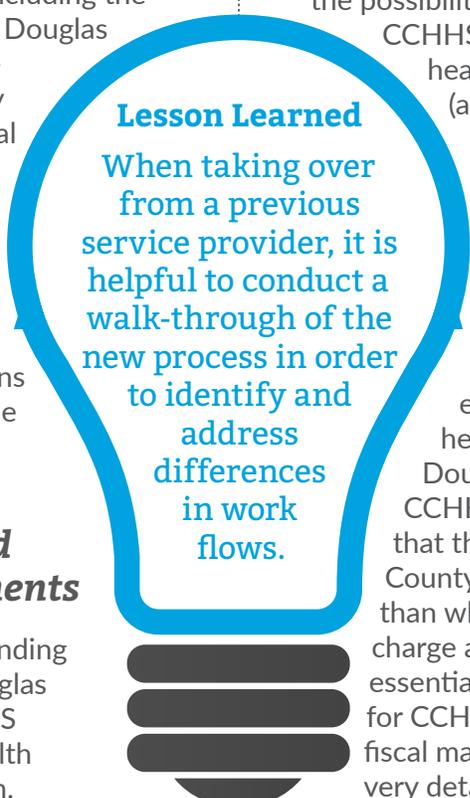
Moving forward, Douglas County may make some changes to the environmental services they provide. The first is that they could require inspections of additional facilities; in particular, hotels and motels. Another potential change is to raise inspection fees. Additionally, Storey County has expressed the desire to revisit the possibility of switching to CCHHS for environmental health services (although this has not been yet been pursued).

Challenges

In order to continue providing environmental health services in Douglas County, CCHHS needs to ensure that the costs in Douglas County remain lower than what the state would charge and also remain essentially cost neutral for CCHHS. The CCHHS fiscal manager generated very detailed reports to demonstrate the cost savings and cost neutrality. CCHHS realized the contract needed to include additional overhead to account for the detailed reports and the percentage of the environmental health manager's time directed at service provision in Douglas County.

Perspectives From the Health Department

Due to health director turnover during the transition to the new



Lesson Learned
When taking over from a previous service provider, it is helpful to conduct a walk-through of the new process in order to identify and address differences in work flows.

sharing arrangement, Dustin Boothe, the Environmental Health Manager for CCHHS, has been the consistent key figure in planning, launching, and now overseeing the operations of the CJS arrangement with Douglas County. He shared the following insights regarding his experience to date.

Exploring

Boothe strongly recommends taking the time needed to carefully think through all of the administrative tasks that support service provision. It's critical to ensure that all costs are covered so the level of service is never compromised.

Planning and Preparing

CCHHS spent about six months planning the CJS arrangement, which included tending to many details about office space, vehicles and other basic logistics. The written plan was sound. The plan was supported by a robust communications effort to ensure that all employees in both counties and the vendors in Douglas County were aware of the pending change. Boothe notes that in the absence of sufficient communication, staff may "fill in the blanks" with rumors and conjecture.

Boothe recommends interviewing staff who provided the service before you take over, as opposed

to solely relying on a review of existing files. Conversations can yield important historical knowledge of the establishment and surface information about the existing process that may not otherwise be documented in the files.

Boothe also suggests conducting a walk-through of the processes that will be used when services will be provided in another jurisdiction. Some examples from the Carson City experience include the process for plan review, opening a new establishment, and handling a change of ownership. A walk-through could illuminate significant differences in process flows and adjustments can be made before implementation that will contribute to a smooth transition.

Implementing and Improving

Despite CCHHS' months-long effort to recruit environmental health staff prior to the implementation of the arrangement, the position to serve Douglas County remained vacant when the new CJS model was initiated. As a result, existing CCHHS staff stepped in to fill the void. Having new hires in place would have made for a smoother transition for the health department (although there did not appear to be any problems related to the staffing model

for the vendors). On the other hand, not having staff hired upon implementation resulted in cost savings to Douglas County.

Boothe strongly advises getting information technology staff involved early on during the planning process. Not only do IT systems vary, so do IT policies and procedures among IT departments.

Sustainability

Looking ahead, Boothe cites the importance of continuing to provide great customer service as well as maintaining relationships in Douglas County. CCHHS has been engaged in other CJS arrangements with Douglas County and provides different types of expertise as requested; therefore, Boothe anticipates ongoing collaboration in several different areas of public health practice.

When CCHHS realized that they had not calculated sufficient administrative fees, they decided to phase in those costs over time instead of adding an additional expense up front in order to ease the burden for Douglas County within the second interlocal agreement. Boothe notes the importance of carefully tracking staff time dedicated to the environmental health project so Douglas County will be charged appropriately.

CENTER FOR SHARING PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

The Center for Sharing Public Health Services helps communities learn how to work across jurisdictional boundaries to deliver public health services. The Center serves as a national resource on cross-jurisdictional sharing (CJS), building the evidence and producing and disseminating tools, methods and models to assist public health agencies and policymakers as they consider and adopt CJS approaches. The Center is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is managed by the Kansas Health Institute. Copyright© Center for Sharing Public Health Services, 2018. Materials may be reprinted with written permission.

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CSPHS/28-VI FEBRUARY 2018