

DIS Mentors for Contact Tracers and Case Investigator Development and Capacity Building Program

About Our Work with DIS Mentors Development and Capacity Building

To combat the COVID-19 pandemic, health departments throughout the United States rapidly scaled up staffing levels. With tens of thousands of new contact tracers and disease investigation (DI) staff, opportunities for advanced training and the transfer of institutional knowledge and support posed a logistical challenge. In response to this pivotal moment the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a call for proposals for models of training and support to develop the skills of disease investigation staff. The National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) responded to that call and was awarded the opportunity to leverage our network and the expertise of our partners to develop an innovative approach to this challenge.

NNPHI partnered with Rocky Mountain Public Health Training Center (RMPHTC), Denver Prevention Training Center (DPTC), and Trailhead Institute to create the Coaching for Enhanced Disease Intervention Skills (CEDIS) Program. RMPHTC and Trailhead Institute assisted in identifying existing content and surveyed materials and produced resources for the CEDIS Program. DPTC developed the training session protocols and provided trainers with disease intervention experience. The CEDIS program is based on a training the trainer approach that uses disease investigator specialists (DIS – experienced disease investigation staff) to coach less-experience or new staff on essential skill principles typically gained through on-the-job experience.

The purpose of the Coaching for Enhanced Disease Intervention Skills (CEDIS) Program is to facilitate relationships between experienced disease intervention (DI) staff and newer DI staff in state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recognize “soft” skills, including gaining trust and persuading people to share personal information, which have typically been taught through coaching on the job, are difficult to acquire in the classroom or via virtual training.

Program Focus

Based on input from experienced CDC staff who provide support to local programs, four skill areas were prioritized for the CEDIS program:

1. Interviewing,
2. Rapport-Building,
3. Problem-Solving, and
4. Cultural Humility.

These inter-related “soft” skills are essential for the success of DI staff. In addition to being critical skills for staff new to the field of public health, these four skills cross multiple program areas and are foundational and transferable across disease intervention work.

Our Work

Coaching expands skills and supports transfer of institutional knowledge and practice wisdom to emerging professionals between individuals. The CEDIS program focuses on four primary areas and piloted pairing experienced DIS, known as *coaches*, with emerging DI professionals, referred to as *participants*. Using a structured training and practice format, coaches were given tools to work with participants. Coaching frameworks and content materials, worksheets and planning forms were created to leverage the experience and training of our public health workforce and to train the next generation of DIS. Program materials include:

- Program Coordinator Guide, which contains all details and instructions
- Coach Guide, which contains handouts, coaching frameworks, and activities
- Promotional webinar slides
- Orientation and training slides
- Coach support session slides
- Evaluation surveys

Our Impact

CEDIS internal and external pilot program highlighted the potential for furthering the knowledge of experienced DI to current and future CT/CI's and inspiring DI's. The coaching program when implemented in Fall 2022 aims to expand skills and support for the estimated 100,000 – 300,000 CT/CI that were hired during the COVID-19 pandemic and those who will remain as full time in the future.

Contact Us

For more information, please contact us at ccp@nnphi.org.