Understanding the ECA

What is the Epidemiology Capacity Assessment (ECA)?
CSTE has periodically assessed epidemiology capacity in state and territorial health departments since 2001. CSTE's 2021 ECA will provide important information about the current capacity of epidemiology programs in state health departments. The 2021 ECA will also serve to measure the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on epidemiological capacity and staffing within state health departments. For more information about previous ECAs, visit the CSTE website: http://www.cste.org/group/ECA or this 2017 MMWR.

CSTE has routinely achieved a 100% response rate on the ECA and with your help, we hope to do so again with the 2021 ECA.

How is the data from the ECA used?
The results from the 2021 ECA will be published in a final, aggregate report and a peer-reviewed publication. Individual responses will not be shared publicly. Individual state reports will only be shared with State Epidemiologists.

Why should my state fill out the ECA?
The ECA is critical to complete as the data are used to not only describe the applied epidemiology workforce but identify gaps in capacity and advocate for improvements for state, local and territorial epidemiology. The ECA results are used often and by a variety of audiences – through educating Congressional policymakers, advocating for greater funding opportunities and as a reference tool during the COVID-19 response. The ECA data are also regularly requested and referenced by funders, academic partners, the general public and our partners to inform public health activity.

All participating states will receive their state report including regional and states of similar size comparisons.

Completing the ECA

How do I start the ECA?
We strongly recommend reviewing and completing the PDF version of the assessment before proceeding with the online form. Additionally, we have included a toolkit to assist with completing the ECA. The toolkit includes: Human Resources Worksheet, Program Area Leads Worksheet and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document. It may also be helpful to consult State Health Department staff, organizational charts, or other documents to complete portions of the ECA.

The online form will be emailed to you directly from Qualtrics. Be sure to check your spam folder if you do not receive the email after the official launch date.
When should I complete the ECA?
The 2021 ECA must be completed by February 26, 2021. If your state is having trouble completing the ECA on time, please let us know as soon as possible at ECA@cste.org.

How long does it take to complete the ECA?
The ECA takes from 2 to 8 hours to collect and submit the data. Utilization of the available worksheets may reduce the time to collect the data.

Where can I look at my state’s report from 2017?
At the start of the data collection period, CSTE will email you a copy of your state report from 2017 for reference.

Who counts as an epidemiologist for the assessment?
State level epidemiologists include:
- All those employed by the state
- All those working at the state level who are either federal assignees (e.g. EISO, CEFO, PHAP) contract employees (e.g. CDC Foundation assignee, contracted from school of public health to work at or for the State Health Department) or fellows (e.g. CSTE trainee).
- State employees assigned to work at a local or regional level (e.g. to conduct investigations for a region of the state).

As part of the pandemic response, your department may have added additional staff including case investigators, contact tracers and epidemiologists. For the purpose of this assessment, please only count COVID-19 response staff serving as an epidemiologist or performing functions consistent with an epidemiologist (see below).

When considering who should be counted, please focus on the functions performed by the individual rather than the job title. Reference the Applied Epidemiology Competencies (AECs) for examples of epidemiology job functions if you need assistance in determining the status of an employee.

Can multiple people fill out the ECA?
The assessment is designed so that it can be completed in multiple sittings and/or by several people. However, only one recipient at a time can open the assessment and record responses, and the browser tab must be closed in order for the next recipient to record their responses.

If you wish to compile the responses from other staff and limit the number of individuals entering information directly in the online assessment, optional worksheets have been prepared that can be modified according to your needs.

Only the State Epidemiologist or their designee should review and submit the completed assessment.

For questions, please contact Sarah Auer at ECA@cste.org