Public expectations have demanded heightened emergency preparedness and response and focused a spotlight on public health workforce preparedness. Concerns that public health workers are not fully prepared to respond to a wide range of threats, hazards, and emergency events have led to expanded efforts to increase the skill and competency levels of the public health workforce. This case study examines public health workforce preparedness in one state from a performance management perspective.

The State Department of Public Health (SDPH) is responsible for protecting and promoting the health of the state’s 15 million residents. The SDPH has seven regional offices, three labs and more than two thousand employees. The state is comprised of 100 counties served by 98 Local Health Departments (LHD) that must meet standards established by SDPH for basic public health services. LHDs also receive a variety of grants and contracts from SDPH for specific categorical programs and services, including a very large and relatively new one for Bioterrorism and Emergency Preparedness. There are approximately 10,000 full and part time employees working in SDPH and the state’s LHDs.

As part of the overall state Bioterrorism and Emergency Preparedness Program a learning management system (LMS) was developed and deployed in collaboration with a neighboring state’s school of public health (SPH). The statewide LMS is web based and incorporates an online worker assessment tool based on competencies linked to courses organized around the same competencies. The overall framework is consistent with the national competency formulations advanced by the Council on Linkages between Academia and Practice and with the National Bioterrorism and Emergency Readiness Competencies. Basic competencies for all public health workers, cross-cutting competencies for front line and more senior public health professionals, and specialized competencies in emergency preparedness and response are then addressed in courses that have been developed by the SPH and by the state and local agencies. SDPH requested that each LHD administer this assessment tool to determine the level of preparedness in the state.

The assessment process focuses on nine basic public health job roles linked to the Core Public Health Competencies and the Emergency Preparedness and Response Competencies. All staff members of the LHDs were assigned one of these nine job roles and directed to complete the self assessment tool on the LMS. The self assessment tool is designed to self-assess the level of competency within their assigned job role. Each staff member rated their level of confidence in their ability to perform each competency expectation. After the staff completed the assessment an automatic individualized report was generated. Each LHD compiled their staff assessments to create an aggregate report.

Based on these aggregate reports, SDPH assessed the preparedness of LHDs. Ninety percent of the local public health agency staff completed the online self-assessment tool. Aggregated reports identified that 67% required training in one or more of the nine emergency response and bioterrorism preparedness core competencies. The reporting