

Introduction to OCCHA Accreditation

2009

OVERVIEW

The Ontario Council on Community Health Accreditation (OCCHA) was formed in 1981. It provides an independent, voluntary, peer evaluation of the administrative and operational aspects of local and regional public health agencies, including program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Its *conviction* is that provision of quality public health services requires sound administrative mechanisms. OCCHA's program grew out of the public health drive for continuous self-improvement. OCCHA's mission is to promote accountability and excellence in public health programs and services.

OCCHA's standards, against which agencies are reviewed, have been developed by Ontario public health professionals, in consultation with their fellow staff and board members across the province.

The 11 members of OCCHA's Board of Directors are nominated by the provincial organizations representing Ontario public health professionals and boards of health.

Any of the thirty-six public health units in Ontario may obtain an application form, documentation and full submission instructions from the OCCHA office. Those that meet the criteria outlined in the documents may apply by following the preparatory steps indicated in the documents and by submitting the completed forms along with the fee. Preparation for accreditation varies according to which standards are met by the agency when it first begins preparations.

Applications are examined by the Principles and Standards Committee of the OCCHA Board of Directors. Based on those applications, agencies considered ready for an accreditation survey are accepted into the program. Others are encouraged to prepare themselves for reapplication at a later date.

Surveys are scheduled by mutual agreement between the agency and OCCHA based on OCCHA's schedule of surveys, surveyor availability. They are conducted by experienced public health professionals, who have been trained as surveyors. Surveys take three day on-site in addition with a minimum of three surveyors on each team. Surveyors' days at the agency are spent examining supporting documentation and interviewing agency personnel and representatives from community agencies.

The benefits of these surveys extend far beyond their immediate purpose of assessment for accreditation. Surveyed agencies have found that seeing their own operation through the eyes of experienced peer reviewers provided them with a useful, more objective check on their internal organization and effective ideas for further improving their programs and services to the community.

All completed survey documents are confidential. A copy of the accreditation report is prepared by the Principles and Standards Committee of the OCCHA Board and provided to the OCCHA Board for formal review. On the basis of the report OCCHA awards conditional or unconditional accreditation. A copy of the accreditation report is issued to the agency. It is comprised of the Board's decision, plus any requirements, recommendations or suggestions that the OCCHA Board feels will help the agency towards enhanced compliance with the accreditation standards. Accreditation is awarded for a three year period; after which the agency concerned must re-apply and be re-surveyed. The three year accreditation also includes an annual one day on-site follow-up to support ongoing compliance with the accreditation standards. This annual review is scheduled on the anniversary of the original on-site accreditation and includes, where possible, one member of the original survey team. The accreditation fee is an annual fee that is charged to support the ongoing activities of OCCHA and the ongoing review of the agency.

Each agency is given 14 days to file its intention to appeal the findings of an accreditation survey. The documentation for such an appeal must be submitted within 34 days of the agency's receipt of the accreditation report. If an appeal is received, the OCCHA Board meets with representatives of the agency to discuss the supporting argument for the appeal. The board then meets in camera to discuss the appeal based on evidence presented. The findings in the revised accreditation report may or may not effect a change in the accreditation award. The decision of the OCCHA Board on the appeal is final.

If no intention of appeal is received within the 14-day time period, the accreditation report and award is considered final. However, the agency is encouraged to send the OCCHA Board comments on the accreditation process or on the content of the accreditation report. These comments are very beneficial in ensuring the continuing growth and improvement of OCCHA's accreditation program.

To avoid a conflict of interest, OCCHA Board policy requires any Director associated with an applying agency to declare that fact at the time of application. The Director(s) concerned must then withdraw from all board considerations of that application and from the board's consideration of related survey results or any related appeal.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURES

1. The agency requests an application form and related documents from the OCCHA office. All accreditation documents, including the application form, Agency Questionnaire and Principles, Standards and Components are available for download on the OCCHA website at www.occha.org.
2. The agency forwards the Application Form along with two copies each of the completed Agency Questionnaire and required attachments. A cheque for the accreditation fee is also required at the time of application to the OCCHA office. (See attached fee schedule).
3. Each application received is first examined by OCCHA's Executive Director for completeness. An analysis of the questionnaire is prepared and forwarded to the Principles and Standards Committee for review. The Committee recommends proceeding with a survey or advising that further preparation is needed.
 - a) If the application is approved, the Executive Director formally informs the Medical Officer of Health of the agency and arranges a mutually agreeable date for the on-site survey. The survey team is then selected. The names of the surveyors are conveyed to the Medical Officer of Health.
 - b) If it is decided that a survey would be premature, the Board's decision and general suggestions of areas requiring further preparation are conveyed to the applicant and the accreditation fee (less an administrative charge) is returned.
4.
 - a) If the applicant encounters an unavoidable and unforeseeable problem that makes the agreed survey date impossible, OCCHA makes every effort to reschedule the survey and proceeds on the new survey date.
 - b) If the applicant cancels a survey after it has been approved and arranged by OCCHA, and notifies OCCHA in writing at least four weeks prior to the scheduled date, it receives a refund of half the accreditation fee. No refund is made for cancellation(s) less than four weeks prior to the scheduled date.
5. The Executive Director communicates with the Medical Officer of Health and/or the accreditation coordinator to confirm the interview schedule and to finalize any survey plans.

6. Prior to the on-site survey, the survey team conducts several pre-survey meetings with the Executive Director to review and clarify any information.
7. The survey commences with an Entrance Conference followed by a review of documents and interviews of personnel and community agencies (in accordance with individual assignments from the Executive Director). A “walk-through” of the agency is also conducted on the first day of the on-site survey.
8. On the last day (after a brief preparation meeting of the survey team) an Exit conference is scheduled with the Medical Officer of Health, senior staff, accreditation coordinator – or other individuals selected by the agency. This meeting allows for some constructive feedback from the surveyors.
9. Following the survey, the surveyor worksheets and assessment sheets are coordinated and a cumulative accreditation report is developed and reviewed by the Principles and Standards Committee. The formal accreditation report is then submitted for review and discussion at the next scheduled meeting of the OCCHA Board.
10. The accreditation report is first considered by OCCHA’s Principles and Standards Committee. Their discussion includes clarifying any areas of uncertainty arising from the committee’s review of all documentation and reports. The committee then recommends to the Board that the agency be awarded unconditional or conditional accreditation. The OCCHA Board forms its final decision, which is conveyed to the agency through the accreditation report and letter.
11. Within 14 days of receiving the report (which includes the accreditation decision and any requirements, recommendations or suggestions the OCCHA Board feels will be helpful, as well as areas of commendation), the agency must state any intention to appeal the decision and must file a written appeal within a further 20 days (i.e. 34 days after receipt of the report). If no notice of intention to appeal has been received within the 14 day period, the OCCHA award and report are considered final.
12. After the OCCHA report is finalized any agency that is awarded unconditional accreditation is required to sign and file with OCCHA a Statement of Agreement to the Accreditation Terms and Conditions (see attached). Upon receipt of this statement, the official OCCHA certificate is issued to the agency. This certificate is held by the agency during the term, although it remains the property of OCCHA. Failure to maintain the Terms and Conditions of Accreditation may result in withdrawal of this certificate.

13. Should the agency be awarded conditional accreditation, the agency is required to submit, within six months, a work plan or action plan to address all stated requirements contained in the accreditation report. The agency will further be required to demonstrate movement forward in implementing the work or action plan at the time of the annual review. Should the agency demonstrate movement forward at the time of the review, the conditional accreditation will be removed and the agency and the official OCCHA certificate will be issued to the agency.
14. The agency will schedule an annual on-site review with OCCHA to support ongoing quality improvement and to provide follow-up documentation as required by the OCCHA to demonstrate compliance with the accreditation standards. This one-day review will be conducted by an OCCHA surveyor and the Executive Director.
15. Each year, the accredited agency will receive an OCCHA invoice for its annual fees. Non-payment of these fees may be considered a violation of the accreditation Terms and Conditions and may result in a withdrawal of accreditation.
16. Under the Terms and Conditions of the accreditation award, OCCHA reserves the right to investigate one or more aspects of an agency's operations. On occasion, such investigations may result in a decision to cancel an agency's accreditation and to require the certificate be returned. In such an event, the agency is entitled to appeal the decertification decision under the same procedures and conditions outlined in Step 11.

OCCHA ACCREDITATION FEES

The accreditation fee must accompany the application. This fee is an annual fee and includes the cost of the survey and ongoing maintenance fees. Fees for the second and third years of accreditation must be paid upon receiving an invoice from OCCHA which will be sent in advance of the year to be covered. Accreditation fees can be found on the OCCHA website at www.occha.org. All fees are reviewed annually and adjusted to reflect inflation. In addition, all fees are subject to G.S.T.

**AGREEMENT TO TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF OCCHA
ACCREDITATION**
(Sample Only)

In accepting OCCHA accreditation for the period of x to y, our agency subscribes to the Principles and Standards set forth in the OCCHA publication entitled **Accreditation Principles, Standards and Components** and agrees to the following Terms and Conditions:

1. We agree to strive to achieve the standards set forth by OCCHA and in no case to allow our agency's standards to fall below the level they had achieved at the time of the OCCHA survey on which our current accreditation is based.
2. In the event that our agency's accreditation award requires us to report to OCCHA by a certain date on steps taken to overcome specific deficiencies, we agree to fulfil that requirement.
3. We agree to immediately notify OCCHA of any significant organizational changes (including dissolution, amalgamation with other agencies or internal re-organization).
4. We agree that during the period of this accreditation, OCCHA may investigate one or more aspects of our agency's operations.
5. We agree that OCCHA remains the owner of the accreditation certificate awarded to our agency, and may withdraw this certificate if the above Terms and Conditions are not maintained, subject only to the right of our agency to appeal to the OCCHA Board to review any such decision before it becomes final.
6. We agree to pay to OCCHA such fees as may be required to participate in the accreditation program, in accordance with the current OCCHA fee scale.

Signed: _____

Title: _____

Public Health Agency: _____

Date: _____