Data Request Services at an Urban Public Health Department

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-The Epidemiology, Planning and Evaluation Unit has a dedicated information specialist who answers about 225 requests a year (about 2,500 to date!)
-The health department also has a librarian, who maintains the digital library, answers questions, performs literature searches, etc.

-Types of requesters:

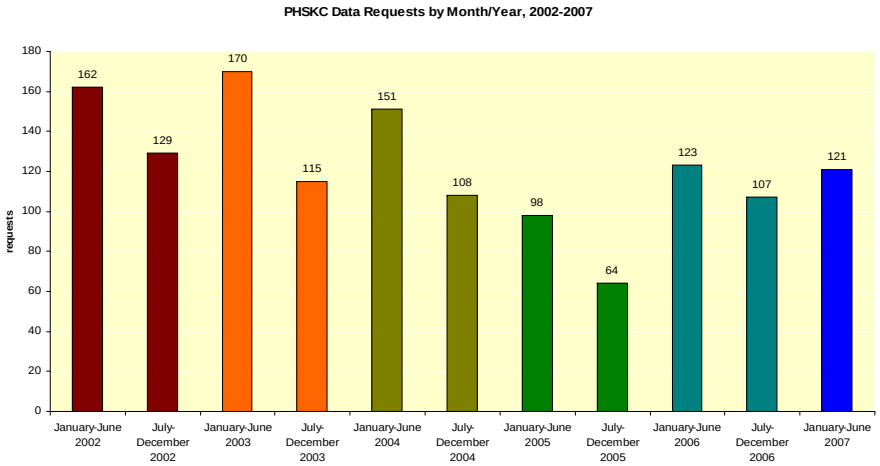
1) within the health department
2) city and county government
3) the media
4) university researchers
5) students
6) grant writers
7) community organizations
8) private individuals, and many others

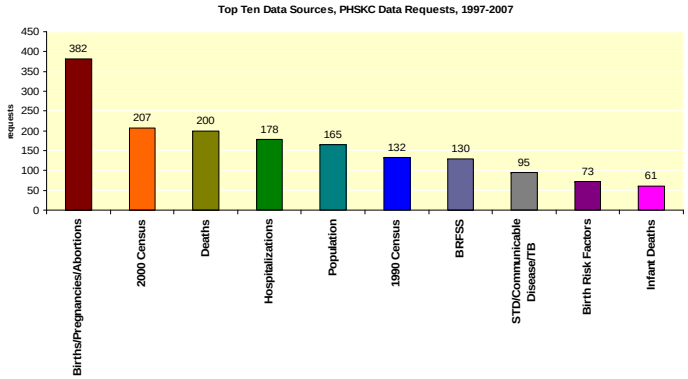
-Types of questions:

1) general data question	What is happening to teen pregnancy rates in King County?
2) specific data question	What is happening to teen pregnancy rates (among 15-17 year olds) in the Renton School District in King County in the last five years, by race/ethnicity?
3) general research question	What are the dangers of cell phone towers?
4) specific research question	What is the best data source to use if I want to look at maternal risk factors for low birth weight by mom's country of birth?
5) government service question	Where can I find a free clinic for a Hep B shot?
6) other	What is my life expectancy?

-How we answer:

1) Customized analyses, with files containing the data (tables, charts) and explanatory e-mail
2) Phone conversation, leading the requester through resources and web sites
3) Referral to appropriate resources
4) Community-based training ("From Data to Action")
5) Contracts developed for workplans for larger projects





-Data and Resources used:

1) Vital statistics- births, deaths (also hospitalizations, communicable disease, etc.)
2) US Census data and other population estimate data
3) Survey data (BRFSS, HYS, in-house surveys)
4) online resources, including the Public Health Digital Library http://www.metrokc.gov/health/library/

-Changes in the service over the past 10 years:

1) THE INTERNET. Much more is available there, and people expect to find everything they need there.
2) The internet, and better computing resources in general, mean that requests have become more complex and involved.
3) As budgets become tighter, the commitment to this central service is constantly under scrutiny (overall it is a valued service)

-Current challenges:

1) Juggling multiple data sets and analytical issues
2) Deciding who our target is
3) How best to deliver information to varied audiences
4) How many limits to place on services available
5) Data privacy issues (e.g. mapping)
6) Tracking the service (showing value)

-Future Trends?

1) More data on the internet could mean a role shift, towards searching guidance and technical assistance
2) Integrate use of Web 2.0 technologies
3) Develop collaborations with outside agencies (data users, libraries, etc.)
4) Develop data user guides (already have for census web site)
5) Get user input by surveying "frequent flyers"
6) Advertise the service more widely (implications?)