

PRDOH Road to Public Health Accreditation: Strengthening Foundational Capabilities

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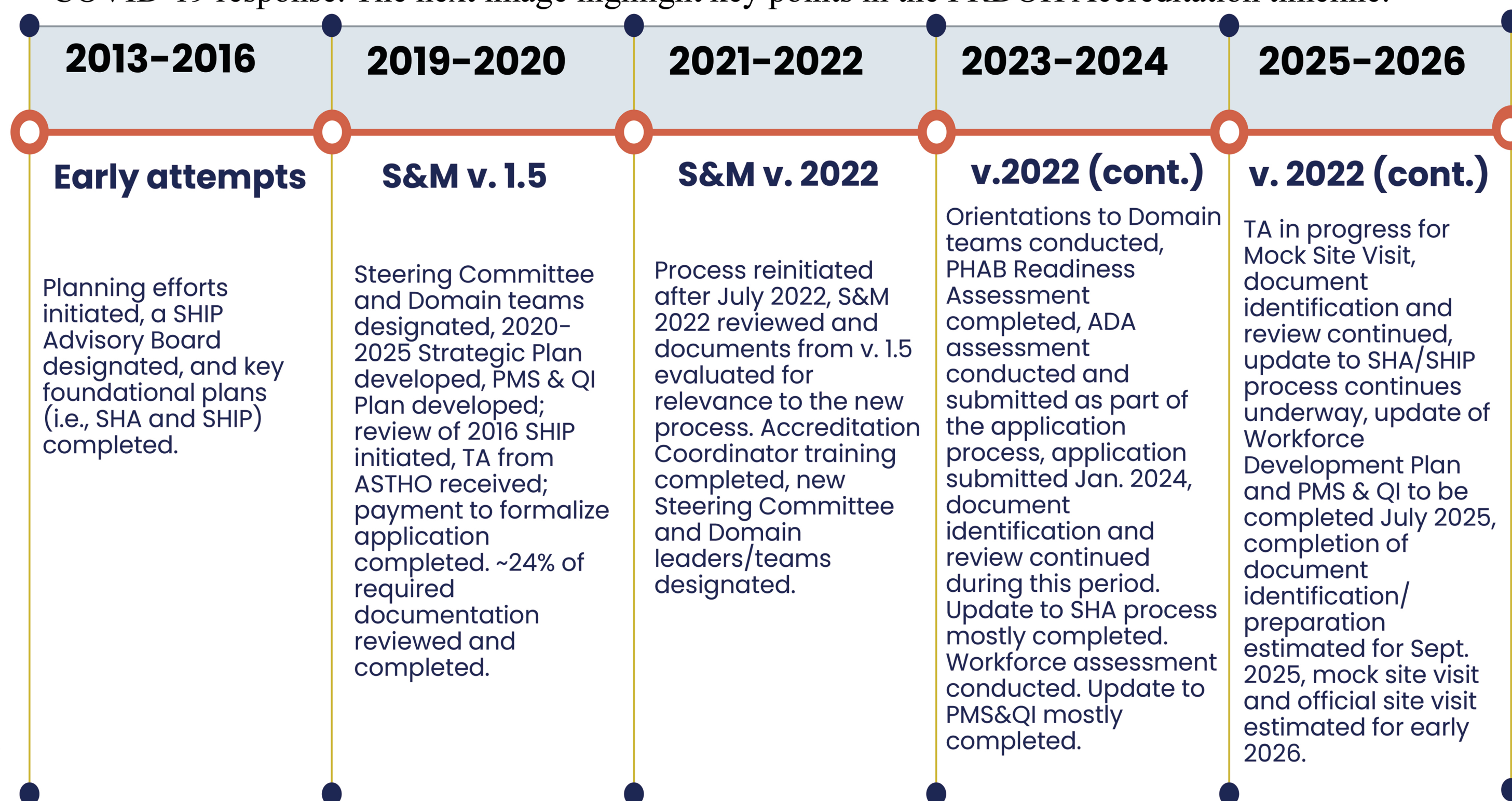
Abstract

An initiative that contributes to the strengthening and sustainability of public health infrastructure is obtaining the Public Health Accreditation, granted by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). This distinction enables health departments to measure and compare their performance against nationally recognized standards, focused on best practices and evidence-based approaches. The PRDOH is working towards obtaining accreditation as a roadmap to plan, implement, and evaluate the necessary improvements to strengthen its capabilities and elevate its performance level to achieve an organizational transformation. Presently, PRDOH has established obtaining initial accreditation as an institutional priority, and it is the first territory seeking this distinction. With that objective, the Agency has established a comprehensive work plan to assure proper preparation, application, and compliance validation through all its work units. Through the accreditation process, several key organizational capabilities have been strengthened, such as communication among PRDOH's operational components, promoting the integration to work as a sole institution towards a common goal. Another important element has been developing and strengthening PRDOH's capabilities related to performance and quality improvement to foster a culture of continuous improvement. For this, the PRDOH has engaged in developing an agency-wide performance management system and quality improvement plan, as well as a comprehensive plan to ensure its effective implementation. Lastly, Accreditation efforts have prioritized the institutionalization of the health equity concept within PRDOH operations and initiatives, pursuing that all residents reach the highest health outcomes possible.

Introduction and Project Timeline

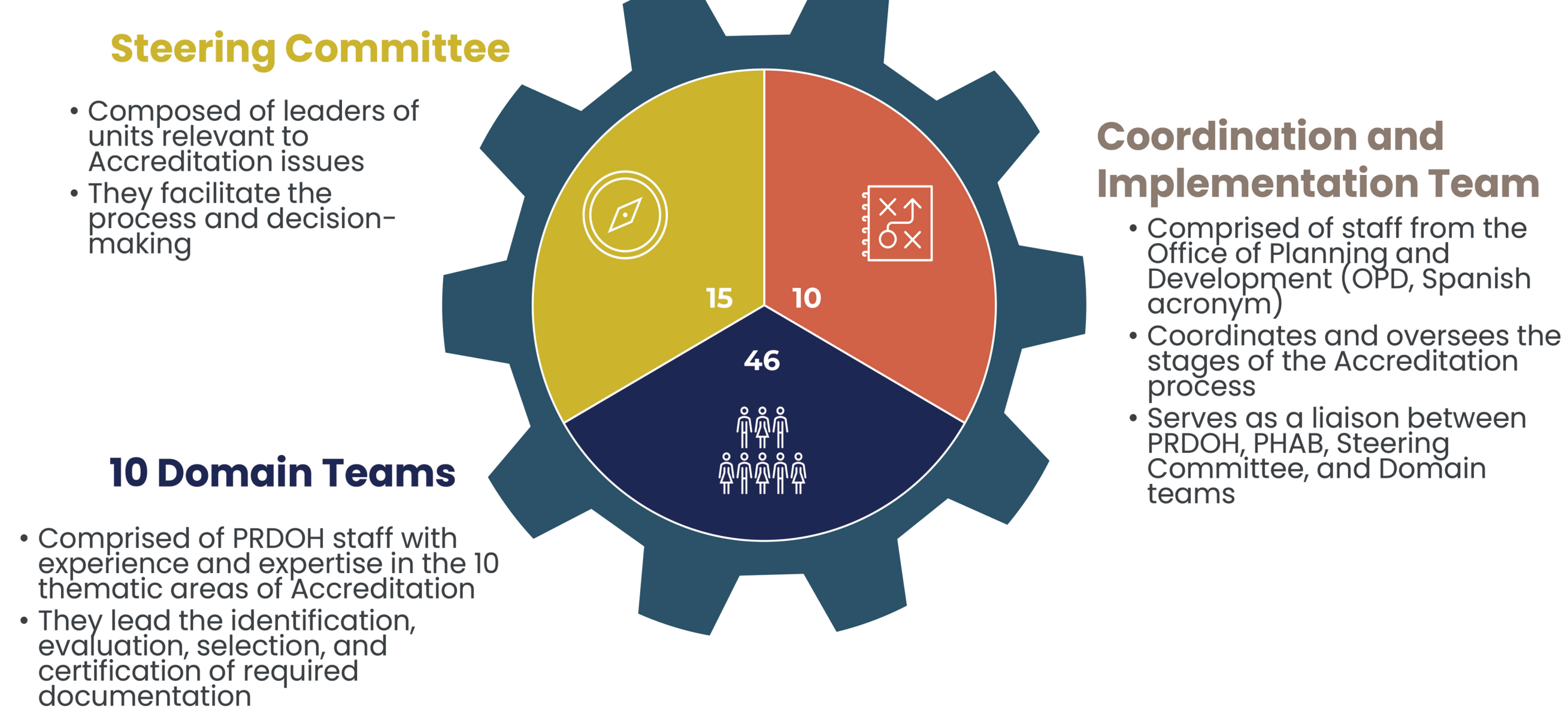
The Puerto Rico Department of Health (PRDOH) is continually seeking alternatives that promote organizational excellence. Thus, it identified public health accreditation as a means to build and strengthen core capacities that support its management of public health matters. This enables the agency to make significant progress in reinforcing the infrastructure needed to adequately address the population's health needs.

Public health accreditation is a recognition granted by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), achieved by demonstrating compliance with several standards and requirements outlined in 10 thematic areas or domains. PRDOH's interest in obtaining initial accreditation has been present since the beginning. Early efforts in the 2010's were conducted in two instances. Then, in 2019 important progress was made by formalizing the Department's intention to apply for accreditation and starting document identification and preparation, reaching ~24% of required documentation for v. 1.5 of PHAB Standards and Measures Manual. However, this last effort was put on hold because of the pressing need to address COVID-19 response. The next image highlight key points in the PRDOH Accreditation timeline:



Methodology

PRDOH Accreditation Components



Activities

Promotion of Accreditation Effort – the public health accreditation is a large-scale endeavor, thus, participation from all PRDOH units is vital. A cohesive and common vision was built to provide direction and help understand the implications and benefits of accreditation. To this end, 1) work was done to **design a logo and message** for the accreditation; 2) a **communication plan** was implemented to keep the workforce informed about the effort; and 3) a **workshop** was offered to the domain teams to discuss expectations and the process for identifying documentation to comply with PHAB. These initiatives helped foster a collaborative environment, generating unity of purpose and commitment to achieving this goal and avoiding disjointed and improvised actions.

Development of complementary efforts – an important part of ensuring the PRDOH is ready for initial accreditation and reaccreditation is developing and strengthening its public health foundational capabilities, particularly related to continuous improvement and health equity. These concepts underpin the health department's success in complying with PHAB's standards and measures and best practices. For this reason, efforts were focused on reviewing and updating the **PRDOH's Performance Management System and Quality Improvement (PMS & QI) Plan**. This plan is key in defining a common and baseline understanding for all units within the PRDOH, as a first step in developing a continuous improvement culture. An action plan to disseminate and implement the plan is underway in 2025. Similarly, efforts were focused on generating a basic understanding of health equity as a foundational capability and framing lens for PHAB's standards and measures v. 2022. To this end, a **workshop** was developed and delivered in October 2024, to the Steering Committee and Domain leaders/team members, in which discussion of the topic was expanded in the context of the PRDOH, its workforce, environment, among other considerations.



We did it!

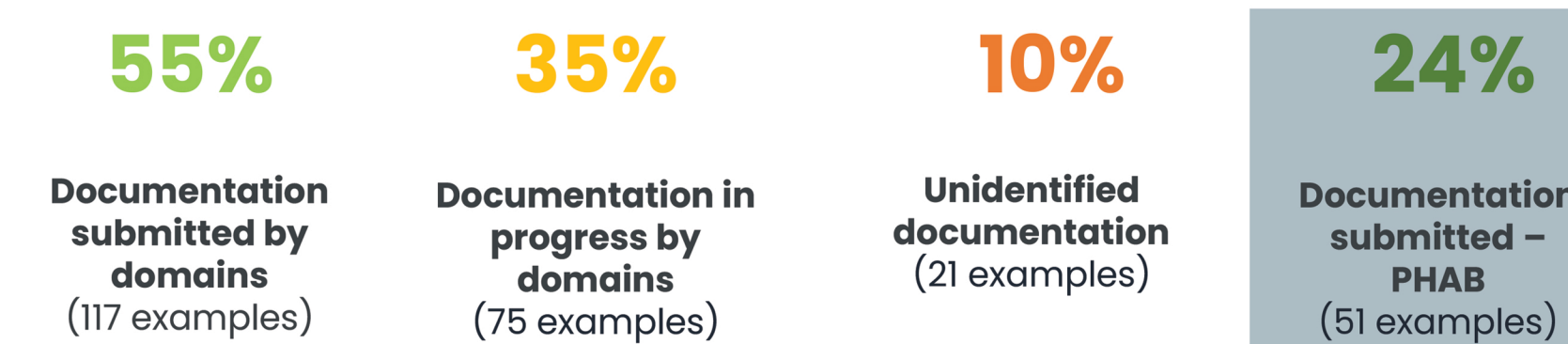
On January 15, 2024, the Department of Health officially submitted its application to the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) to obtain Public Health Accreditation. This milestone reaffirms our commitment to building a stronger Department and providing better services to the Puerto Rican community.

Progress

Accreditation Status: Required Documentation - June 15, 2025

Distribution of measures and examples by domain

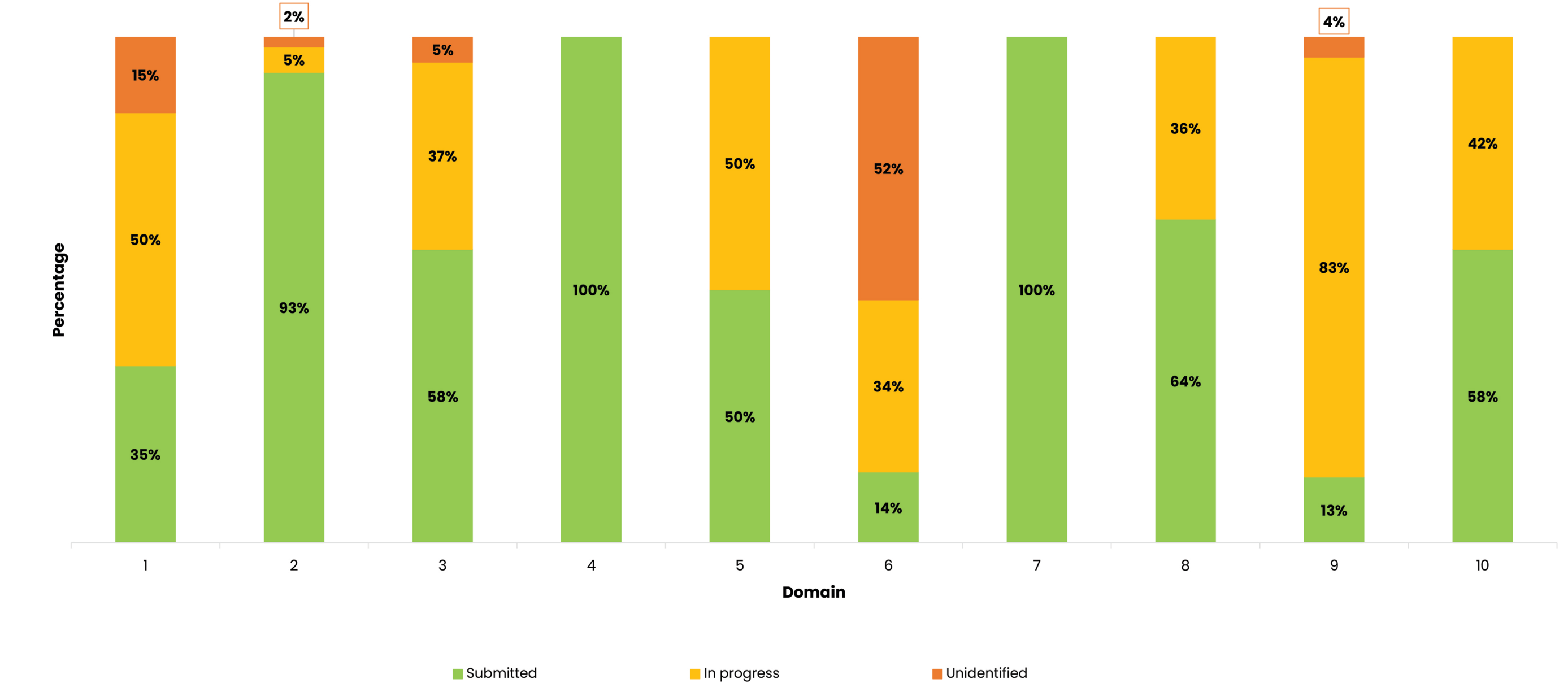
Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Measures	14	31	13	4	9	16	6	8	14	31	144
Examples	20	44	19	7	12	29	8	11	23	40	213



Accreditation Checklist

- PHAB Training: ✓
- Readiness Assessment: ✓
- Application: ✓
- Required Documentation: **90%**
- Mock Site Visit: **early 2026**
- Site Visit: **early 2026**

Required Documentation - Status: June 15, 2025



Conclusions

Achieving initial accreditation is crucial for the PRDOH. It has been a long standing goal; and it requires continuity and consistency. The PRDOH remains steadfast in its goal of becoming the first territory to achieve accreditation by 2026 and paving the way for future reaccreditations. This distinction will only strengthen its capacity for organizational transformation.

Acknowledgements

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