

BUILDING ON A DECADE OF LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS

This special issue of the MayaTech Times provides highlights of our legislative analysis work. We invite you to see for yourself why, over the past 10 years, MayaTech has emerged as one of the leading specialists in legislative research.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH RESEARCH AND PUBLIC POLICY

The boundaries of public health research are being expanded to include issues such as the influence of culture and social environment on the effectiveness of specific health intervention programs. MayaTech is employing its decade of legislative research and analysis experience to uncover the nonprogrammatic factors influencing the success of these programs. See page 1.

QUALITY WORK LEADS TO RECOGNITION AND EXPERT STATUS

MayaTech's unique combination of legal, topical, and applied research and evaluation experience distinguishes us from other firms. See page 1.

MAYATECH LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS PROJECTS AND STAFF

These two boxes summarize the corporate experience and staff expertise that enables MayaTech to offer its clients interdisciplinary, analytically sound, and comprehensive research and evaluation services. See page 2.

CONNECTING LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH TO POLICY OUTCOMES: AN INTERVIEW WITH LIZA FUES

When the National Cancer Institute's State Cancer Legislative Database Program began, its purpose was to track cancer-related laws. It has now grown to include trends in policy adoption as well as evaluation of how these laws influence access to and use of health care services. Liza Fues reflects on the evolution of this important project. See page 3.

NAVIGATING UNCHARTED TERRITORY: MAKING SENSE OF STATE TOBACCO APPROPRIATIONS

One of the primary challenges in evaluating the policy and environmental variables that impact public health is identifying relevant legislation and regulation policies. This article describes MayaTech's approach to the challenges associated with identifying relationships between funding mechanisms and tobacco control. See page 3.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: LEGISLATIVE ANALYSIS IN ACTION

Researching the laws that exist in a given state and on a given topic is a requirement for many of MayaTech's legislative analysis projects. But, this is just the first step. This article highlights some of the practical ways MayaTech's legislative research has been used to assist grantees and inform policy audiences. See page 4.

New Directions for Public Health Research and Public Policy

Historically, the public health field has focused on altering individual behaviors such as needle sharing, practicing unsafe sex, and overeating. Traditional interventions for these behaviors have included encouraging the use of clean needles and condoms to prevent HIV infection, and encouraging a healthy diet and exercise program to prevent heart disease, obesity, and other chronic diseases. In turn, methods have been established to measure the effectiveness of these interventions, particularly when controlling for individual demographics and socioeconomic status.

In the last few years, public health researchers have increasingly examined the capacity of and the processes by which communities or programs are able to implement individual-level interventions. Capacity-building and implementation processes are considered part of the broader cultural and

social environment in which the communities or programs reside. Measures of policy activity or strength are often included in research and evaluation studies as a means of evaluating capacity or process. For example, researchers interested in examining the impact of an HIV prevention intervention on reducing risky behaviors might also examine existing state and local policies that could facilitate or limit the program's ability to implement the intervention.

Although the importance of policy and other environmental variables has long been acknowledged, the evaluation of the effects of these variables on public health has been limited. Early public policy researchers examined the types of existing policy and environmental variables and then analyzed only how these policies were adapted and implemented by others. Public health researchers

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Quality Work Leads to Recognition and Expert Status

Over the past decade, MayaTech's legislative analysis portfolio has grown from 1 multi-year project to 14 projects (see the yellow box on page 2 for a list of the projects awarded to date). When asked what has led to the substantial growth of MayaTech's legislative analysis portfolio over the past 10 years, Jamie F. Chriqui, Ph.D., vice president of MayaTech's Center for Health Policy and Legislative Analysis comments, "It's simple ... word of mouth about our methodological expertise;

our exacting standards; and, to some extent, our topical expertise."

Chriqui described the expansion as akin to a "chain reaction"—work with one client on a project has led directly to work on other projects for other clients. For example, Chriqui noted that the American Stop Smoking Intervention Study (ASSIST) Evaluation Legislative Ratings project was a direct spin-off of longstanding work for the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) State Cancer

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MayaTech's Center for Health Policy and Legislative Analysis Staff

New Directions for Public Health Research and Public Policy

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have recently, however, begun to evaluate the influence of the policy and environmental variables on the relationship between specific interventions or programs and associated outcomes.

This shift has been reflected in the technical assistance that MayaTech provides to government grantees. “Over the past few years, we have seen our government clients move from evaluating their grantees solely on their attitudinal and behavioral outcomes for participants to assessing enhancements in grantees’ capacity to develop and implement programmatic interventions,” says Suzanne Randolph, Ph.D., scientific director of MayaTech’s Research and Evaluation Division. “Clients are interested in finding out what is happening with these projects as far as their process outcomes. They want to know what is happening within that ‘black box,’ and they are looking for ways to monitor and evaluate it.”

Integrating policy measures into public health research studies can be a complex process, however. In many instances, the policy data are not readily available, making it necessary first to identify pertinent policy variables as they relate to the area being studied (e.g., laws and administrative regulations); then to convert that information into a meaningful format that can be used for research and evaluation purposes and integrate this information into the study; and later to connect it to the study’s outcomes. Including such policy variables as a component of the broader social environment

helps to provide a contextual understanding of the additional, nonprogrammatic factors that may affect individual outcomes.

At the same time, current research on how these policy and environmental variables influence health outcomes is limited, with much of what exists relating to specific laws or regulations. Relatively little research has been published that addresses how to conduct these types of evaluations or how long it takes for policy and environmental variables to begin to influence public health. Frameworks that assess the capacity of a community, an organization, or a project to implement these policies are also necessary. An evaluation framework that includes process outcomes can illustrate how a policy was implemented and can document the challenges and successes associated with the process. This information can assist others design and implement policy more efficiently.

Evaluating the effects of policy and environmental variables is an evolving field for the public health community. MayaTech is at the forefront of this area, particularly on the issues of tobacco control, substance abuse and HIV prevention, physical activity promotion, cancer screening promotion, and chronic disease prevention (heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and other conditions). MayaTech has over a decade of experience conducting legislative research and analysis and translating this information for use in public health research and evaluation studies.

Selected MayaTech Legislative Analysis Projects

Support Contract for the Public Health Agency Initiative

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

Support Services for the State Cancer Policy Database Program

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

Feasibility Study: Alcohol Policy Information System

National Institutes of Health/National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

ASSIST Evaluation Legislative Ratings

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

State Illicit Drug Legislative Surveillance

Andrews University

Local Ordinance Data Verification for the ImpacTeen Initiative

University of Illinois at Chicago

Local Alcohol Policy Information System

National Institutes of Health/National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

State Funding for Tobacco Control Legislative Tracking System

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Office on Smoking and Health

Economic Costs of Marijuana Use

RAND Corporation

State Cancer Policy Database Support Services

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

Legislative Tracking System

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Office on Smoking and Health

ImpacTeen Legislative Data Activities

University of Illinois at Chicago

Within- and Cross-National Analyses of the Effects of Cannabis Depenalization

RAND Corporation

Tracking and Evaluating Physical Activity Legislative Policies

National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

Quality Work Leads to Recognition and Expert Status

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Legislative Database (SCLD) Program. Then, through work on the ASSIST Evaluation project, MayaTech began working on an ImpacTeen project that is supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is led by researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Through the ImpacTeen work, MayaTech began working with researchers at the RAND Corporation to further examine state marijuana policies. Most recently, the linkages formed during work on SCLD have resulted in an NCI legislative policy project on physical activity.

Methodological Expertise

MayaTech and its staff have proven expertise in researching and analyzing health-related laws and regulations for a variety of clients across a broad range of topic areas. MayaTech’s strength lies in the use of proven analytic methods for ensuring consistency and accuracy. Yet, Chriqui often finds herself reminding staff and clients alike that, “Legislative research is not an exact science. In some ways, we are really pioneers in trying to translate complex legal information into formats appropriate for use in

larger-scale research and evaluation studies.” Citing the complicated nature of the process, Chriqui explains, “Before we can even translate this information, we must use proven methods to ensure that we have captured all relevant laws and analyzed them in a consistent and reliable format.”

Assisted by MayaTech’s substantial corporate and staff experience in conducting legislative research and analysis, the company has developed a sound methodology for successfully researching and analyzing state laws for a variety of clients and purposes. At the outset of each project, staff develop project-specific protocols to guide all legal research and analysis activities. While the protocols vary from project to project, they always serve to define key legal, health, and scientific terms; clarify unique issues associated with topic areas or categories of law; and provide guidelines and coding protocols for reviewing and analyzing all relevant laws. Whether a project involves Federal, state, county, or municipal laws, the analytic process is the same. Chriqui notes, “There have been instances where clients have asked us to pare down the process but

we have not been willing to do so because it would compromise the integrity of our work.”

Exacting Standards

A hallmark of MayaTech’s legislative analysis work is its quality control process. When conducting primary legal research for a client, MayaTech ensures that a minimum of two staff persons conducts the research and analysis. Once relevant laws are identified, a legislative researcher, with experience in conducting this type of work, performs the initial legislative analysis. Upon completion of this initial coding, in most instances, a senior staff member will review the research and analysis for quality control purposes. However, some research efforts require that we assign teams to review and code simultaneously the laws being analyzed and then meet to form a consensus coding or rating.

According to Chriqui, such analytic approaches are tailored to meet the needs of individual clients. For example, one MayaTech client may code a law by assigning a series of hierarchical keywords along with creating a detailed text summary of the law. For another client, however, the same law may be coded using an ordinal measurement or coding scheme. “Part of what makes this work so interesting is that we might be examining the same topics or laws for two different clients and using multiple approaches to analyzing and coding the laws that, ultimately, will tell the same story,” explains Chriqui.

Over the last decade MayaTech has worked diligently to perfect its technical approach to conducting sound legislative research and analysis. This dedication to excellence has earned the company an outstanding reputation among applied social science research firms and has produced a substantial body of legislative work.

MayaTech’s Legislative Analysis Staff: Multidimensional Talent

Many firms currently offer legislative research services in a variety of policy areas. Often these services include primarily legal research by way of tracking bills and providing legislative summaries. Other firms offer applied analytic research and evaluation services, but often their topical expertise is confined to only a few specific areas within the broad realm of health policy, and they do not offer specific expertise in legal research and analysis. MayaTech’s Center for Health Policy and Legislative Analysis (HPLA) combines all of these com-

ponents—legal research, broad topical expertise, and applied research and evaluation services—to provide an interdisciplinary, analytically sound, and comprehensive approach for our clients. The composition of the HPLA staff further reflects the multidimensional nature of MayaTech’s overall approach to research. Our resident staff includes a number of attorneys, Ph.D.-level scientists, and master’s-trained researchers. Staff have both educational and work experience in the fields of law, health policy, research methodology and analytic methods, public health, government relations, public affairs/policy, library and information science, health education, and technical writing.

CONNECTING LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH TO POLICY OUTCOMES: *An Interview with Liza Fues*

Liza A. Fues, J.D., joined The MayaTech Corporation in 1994 and is in her 8th year as project director of the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) State Cancer Legislative Database (SCLD). Ms. Fues ensures the technical quality of a database that contains more than 3,200 abstracts of state legislation. Her involvement in the public health field spans more than a decade. During this time, Ms. Fues has overseen responses to legislative queries from the White House, state public health departments, Federal government entities, researchers, and other organizations. Prior to joining MayaTech, Ms. Fues conducted statutory law and legal analyses as a litigation associate for a law firm.



In your experience, what aspect of conducting legislative research for the Program has presented the greatest challenge, and how was it overcome?

Without a doubt, conducting historical research presented the greatest challenge to the SCLD team. MayaTech began conducting legislative research in 1993 with two goals: first, to obtain and analyze substantive bills enacted in each state for each of the SCLD topic areas; then, to develop annual summaries of the law based upon each state's legislative code. We were able to obtain older bills through hours of research at local law libraries. However, outdated state codes were not locally available, due largely to the logistics of storing voluminous sets of codes for 50 states and the District of Columbia. To overcome this obstacle, we established baseline years for each topic, obtained the codes we needed, and worked from there.

What is your background, and how did you come to work for MayaTech?

I went to law school with the intent of working in the area of health law. Prior to joining MayaTech, I worked as an attorney in a large law firm doing health law and litigation. Also, because so many of my family members have been touched by cancer, I'm a long-time volunteer for the American Cancer Society. The ad describing the position of project manager for the SCLD Program was irresistible, as it perfectly combined my interests in health law and cancer issues. I answered the ad in 1994, and I've been here ever since.

From your perspective as a contractor, what do you see as the most significant change in the SCLD Program since its inception?

Because a database is at the heart of the SCLD Program, technological advances have had an enormous impact on the way we work. In the "old days," we relied heavily on library research to populate the database, using volumes of legislative code, paper supplements, and microfiche to obtain relevant laws. Now we take advantage of online legislative services that allow us to search the universe of enacted legislation at the push of a button. We also are able to disseminate SCLD data via the Program's Web site at www.sclld-nci.net.

Have the data contained within the SCLD Program contributed to public policy research on chronic disease?

Yes! Data from SCLD have been presented at numerous professional meetings over the years. The SCLD Program has published several journal articles; other researchers also have included SCLD data in journal articles. Data from SCLD have been used in monographs published by the NCI and have been incorporated into the evaluation phase of the NCI's American Stop Smoking Intervention Study (ASSIST).

How does the legislative research that MayaTech conducts differ from that of other legislative tracking services? What type of expertise is necessary to conduct this level of legislative analysis?

MayaTech's services differ from those offered by legislative tracking services precisely because MayaTech isn't a tracking service. While monitoring the enactment of laws certainly is part of our service, we offer much more. Our staff analyze each piece of legislation and, using custom-designed topical protocols, prepare detailed text abstracts of each law. Each abstract also incorporates topical keywords to facilitate database searches. Finally, we read each newly enacted law in the context of laws previously enacted in order to identify the ways in which the new law changes the body of law.

To perform this work, we draw on a number of different educational and experiential backgrounds. Our team includes attorneys, health policy specialists, library science specialists, individuals from government affairs, and computer specialists.

Given the types of legislative research that MayaTech has conducted over the past decade, how have these experiences poised the company to branch into other areas?

Because we have spent so many years conducting legislative research and analysis, we have developed efficient methodologies for getting the job done. Our experience has afforded our staff the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of book-based library research, as well as the most reliable Internet-based sources of materials. Collectively, our team possesses substantive expertise in numerous areas: cancer and other chronic diseases, tobacco, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, depenalization of marijuana, obesity, and physical activity. Finally, we have researched Federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and ordinances. These skills and experiences provide a strong foundation for our team to perform legislative research in virtually any health-related area.

Can you explain the connection between legislative research and health outcomes, and the possible policy implications of this connection?

Our work with SCLD provides some great examples of how legislative research and health outcomes can be tied together and used to identify policy options. For example, some of the legislative research we tracked in SCLD were cancer screening reimbursement laws that states enacted in an attempt to ensure that health insurance companies covered the cost of annual screening mammograms for women. MayaTech has the ability to connect this legislative research with national health services data to examine the relationship between these reimbursement laws and the use of cancer screening services.

Most importantly, MayaTech has the ability to analyze and rate the various characteristics of the laws and identify which characteristics are most related to increases in health outcomes. This type of information can be used by states to craft more effective laws and influence health outcomes.

NAVIGATING UNCHARTED TERRITORY:

Making Sense of State Tobacco Appropriations

Measuring a state's capacity for implementing health policies involves examining the resources that are allocated for health programs and service delivery. The quest for legislative evidence to establish the links between policy, resources, and services can be a complicated one. To facilitate the search, The MayaTech Corporation, at the request of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has developed a unique methodology for analyzing legislative appropriations to measure the capacity of state-level tobacco policy implementation.

The CDC is required by Congress to monitor tobacco-related legislation to assess the Nation's and states' progress in meeting key tobacco-control objectives and to assist states with tobacco-related policy issues. In response to the CDC's initiatives to

monitor state investments in tobacco control, MayaTech is analyzing state appropriations established from revenue generated from the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with the tobacco industry. This settlement includes 46 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories, as well as the individual settlements made with four states in 1997.

During the course of tracking and analyzing state appropriations between fiscal years 1999 and 2005, MayaTech has developed standardized procedures to address the complexities associated with state budgeting processes and funding strategies. However, the primary goal of the CDC project—to connect dollar amounts, tobacco-related purposes, and receiving agencies with every relevant state appropriation generated from tobacco settlement revenue—presents many challenges.

Because there are several types of tobacco settlement-related appropriations legislation, each type of legislation requires a different approach for tracking and analyzing relevant appropriations established for tobacco prevention and control efforts. The most common type of legislation containing relevant appropriations has been found in state appropriations bills, which in any given state can vary in number from one large bill to several dozen potentially relevant bills. Another type of legislation that includes relevant appropriations are bills that reference the creation of special funding infrastructures for allocating tobacco settlement revenue. To identify these types of legislation, MayaTech's staff use various technologies to scan state appropriations bills—which are often thousands of pages in length—for keywords (e.g., tobacco, smoking, and special fund

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From Policy to Practice: Legislative Analysis in Action

For many of the legislative analysis projects that MayaTech has conducted, the client has had an interest in using the information for purposes beyond knowing what laws exist in a given state. Legislative data compiled by MayaTech staff have been used to create a variety of products that, when incorporated into larger research and evaluation studies, have served as a technical assistance mechanism for state-based grantees and as the basis for testimony before policy audiences. The following are a few examples of how our work has been applied:

State Illicit Drug Policies: Selected Laws from the 50 States: All data included in this publication were based on original legal research and analysis conducted by MayaTech. The publication, printed in 2002, was disseminated to members of Congress, state legislators, state and Federal government agencies, researchers, the media, and members of the general public. This document was produced under The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-supported ImpacTeen initiative.

Information Dissemination for the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) State Cancer Legislative Database (SCLD) Program. In addition to the legal research and analysis that MayaTech conducts for this project, staff are also responsible for developing fact sheets, newsletters, presentations, and other products for the NCI. The materials are disseminated to Federal and state government officials, legislative staff, members of the media, researchers, students, and the general public. This information is also available on the SCLD Web site: <http://www.sclد-nci.net>.

Evaluation of the National Cancer Institute's American Stop Smoking Intervention Study (ASSIST). MayaTech was responsible for original legal research and analysis of state tobacco control laws as well as working with a panel of experts and the Federal Government client to develop a measure for rating the extensiveness of state tobacco control laws. The legislative ratings data were included as a variable in the overall evaluation model for the ASSIST evaluation. The rating measures were also published in *Tobacco Control*.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) State Tobacco Activity Tracking and Evaluation System (STATE). Since 2002, MayaTech has researched and compiled state tobacco control legislative information that is included in the STATE System, which is maintained by CDC's Office on Smoking and Health. Data from STATE are provided to state grantees and are available to the public and other points of contact.

Tobacco Control State Highlights. State tobacco-related appropriations data compiled by MayaTech for CDC's Office on Smoking and Health (OSH) have been included in OSH's periodic publication, *Tobacco Control State Highlights*.

Testimony before the Maryland Senate Special Committee on Substance Abuse. As a result of the *State Illicit Drug Policies* chartbook, staff from MayaTech and other members of the ImpacTeen initiative were asked to testify before a state legislative committee regarding variations in state illicit drug policies.

NAVIGATING UNCHARTED TERRITORY:

Making Sense of State Tobacco Appropriations

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names) associated with potentially relevant appropriations. This allows the research teams to locate, for example, a single relevant appropriation among several thousand appropriations provisions.

Project staff have also encountered legislation that outlines specifically both special funds and allocation formulas associated with tobacco settlement revenue. In such cases, these documents are analyzed in their entirety to ensure those percentage allotments to tobacco-related purposes and references to statute sections are identified and coded. "Deciphering every state's plan for its tobacco settlement revenue is very challenging, because states are constantly amending their funding strategies," says Senior Legislative Analyst James F. Igoe, who leads the project. "For instance, special funds created for the tobacco settlement often disappear and are replaced by completely new special funds."

MayaTech analysts also discovered that the language in some bills was too vague to identify adequately the source or purpose of a potentially relevant appropriation. To seek further clarification on a particular appropriation or special fund, the analysts developed a procedure for conducting "secondary source" research related to the legislation. These secondary sources include fiscal or analytical documents produced by legislative support units,

summary documents from state budget and health department offices, and other documents produced by entities established to oversee tobacco settlement revenues. MayaTech analysts directly contact state legislative and budget staff, when there are no relevant documents on state Web sites, to request clarification regarding certain tobacco appropriations or special funds. "Although all of the researchers on the project team have become experts in using the Internet to locate the answers to our legislative questions, we have received invaluable guidance from our state contacts," Igoe explains. "In some cases, we have contacted the same state staffers for all 5 years of analysis in order to clarify specific aspects of legislative provisions, and I am continually impressed with the level of assistance that we have received."

MayaTech's tracking and analysis of state appropriations has enabled the CDC to observe how states are using tobacco settlement revenues to achieve policy goals related to tobacco control. The methodology that MayaTech has developed to complete this work—appropriations analysis—can be used in other areas of public health—including HIV, cancer, obesity, and other health promotion efforts—to help agencies effectively measure the impact of state health policy implementation.

MayaTech Times reports on the projects and programs underway at The MayaTech® Corporation and the staff members who contribute to our success. We are pleased to share this information with our colleagues, clients, and friends. If you would like to receive future issues, or if you have questions or comments, please contact the *MayaTech Times*, 1100 Wayne Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910-5645; phone: (301) 587-1600; fax: (301) 587-0709; e-mail: busdev@mayatech.com; Web site: <http://www.mayatech.com>

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