On April 5, 2016, 18 international health officials came together at DBHIDS for a “meeting of the minds.” The leaders, representing 8 countries throughout North America, Europe, and Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand), came to Philadelphia after hearing about the innovative public health strategies we are using to address and improve behavioral health outcomes in our city.

The leaders are part of a group, called the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL), which is a unique international collaborative that focuses on improving mental health and addictions services. IIMHL organizes systems -- like DBHIDS -- for innovation sharing, networking, and problem solving across countries and agencies, with an overall aim of providing better outcomes for people who use mental health and addiction services and their families -- also, a shared vision of our Department.

Our work initially attracted the attention of the group at the 2015 IIMHL Combined Meeting in Vancouver where Dr. Evans presented on aspects of our population health management approach; an approach centered on helping people to achieve overall health and wellness across all populations in Philadelphia. Some of the strategies to achieving population health include:

- Addressing the full spectrum of interventions by incorporating health promotion, “upstream” prevention, and early intervention strategies, instead of intervening at the point of diagnosis
- Encouraging community “health activation,” which empowers people to take ownership of their own health and wellness and to support the health efforts of their peers
- Building community capacity to better address behavioral health conditions by expanding services offered in non-treatment settings

The group was particularly intrigued to hear about the non-traditional, transformative, and innovative approaches that we are taking to increase behavioral health literacy across communities, including Mental Health First Aid, behavioral health screenings, Porch Light Series murals, and cross-system collaborations with other city organizations (including the Mayor’s Office).

In addition to learning about Philadelphia’s model and better understanding how it can possibly translate in their own countries, DBHIDS was able to learn about similar challenges and unique approaches in other parts of the world.

After the discussion, the group experienced, first-hand, a Department-hosted behavioral health community screening event held at SEPTA’s Jefferson Station where over 80 people were screened and over 150 individuals visited the resource table.

This special, one-of-a-kind event garnered attention from local media outlets, including KYW and WHYY. Take a look at some of the photos taken at the April 5th discussion and community screening event.

This unique meeting is the start of much to come in regards to our work with international communities. As a next step, Philadelphia has committed to working with IIMHL to participate in an Urban Mental Health Learning Collaborative (to include representation from Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York City, Glasgow, London, Manchester, Toronto, etc). While the overall goals have yet to be concluded, the partnership will provide opportunities for building alliances and conducting in-depth cross country/cultural research comparisons.

Please find a letter of appreciation to Mayor Kenney from the President and CEO of IIMHL.