

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE  
MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION FOR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH  
ON THE  
UNIQUE ROLE OF  
LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

Local health departments in Michigan are governmental entities with a legal responsibility to assure the public's health, (Michigan Public Health Code, Public Act 368 of 1978). Certain core functions and essential services are important to assure the public's health. Determining if these functions and services are present, and ensuring their delivery, is the unique role of local health departments.

No other entity assesses threats to the community from communicable and chronic diseases, poor access to health care or use of health promotion practices, and failure to protect the environment. To meet these challenges, local public health departments require assistance from local units of government, the State of Michigan, and the Federal government in addition to activities and support from the private, as well as, non-profit sectors and individual citizens.

**TEN ESSENTIAL LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES**

Healthy communities require that the following ten essential local public health services be performed with close coordination among community organizations:

1. Monitor health status to identify community health problems. Collect, manage, and analyze health-related data for knowledge-based decisions.
2. Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community. Prevent and control epidemics and contain diseases/injuries.
3. Inform, educate and empower people about health issues.
4. Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.
5. Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts.
6. Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and assure safety.
7. Link people to needed personal health services and assure that provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.
8. Assure a competent public health and personal health care workforce.
9. Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
10. Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

**CORE FUNCTIONS**

Local public health departments with their Boards and community should perform three core functions in the delivery of these ten essential public health services. This process requires public health tools and skills to assess, investigate, analyze, advocate, prioritize, plan, manage, implement, evaluate, and inform.

## **1. Assessment**

Rooted in the community, local health departments are in a unique position to be familiar with and assess a community's collective resources, assets, gaps, and challenges. Local public health departments not only bring the community's perspective, but they are legally mandated to represent the interests of all residents in a jurisdiction.

### **State of Michigan Funded Example:**

- Through the Healthy Michigan Fund, the Community Health Assessment and Improvement Program is present in each local jurisdiction.

## **2. Policy Development**

The goal of policy is development of laws, regulations, and policies to improve health and quality of life. Local public health departments are in a unique position to analyze and draw conclusions about local data gathered through assessment. Local Public Health Departments can then make relevant recommendations to Boards and other elected officials. Effective policy requires local identification, familiarity with and responsibility for priorities based on needs, and community resources. The timely, appropriate application of knowledge and the scientific basis for the field of public health provides a foundation for balanced and thoughtful decisions.

### **State of Michigan and Local Public Health Funded Example:**

- The development and application of Michigan's Health Indicators to determine priorities and direct policy.
- Development of local ordinances and regulations as provided in Public Health Code Section 2441 to address pressing and/or unique public health challenges in the community, such as wellhead protection.

## **3. Assurance**

Public health agencies assure the availability of all core functions and the ten essential services. Sometimes a local health department must prioritize and select from among the ten essential services when there are unique gaps or challenges. Local public health need not provide all elements directly. At a minimum, the public is informed of gaps or disparities. The local health department allocates its resources in areas of highest priority in the community. It provides the safety net for individuals in need of clinical, health promotion, health protection and/or environmental services. It assures or arranges access to these services for those with personal or environmental barriers.

### **State of Michigan and Local Public Health Funded Example:**

- Monitoring client access to timely, effective, and appropriate medical care is the Medicaid Assurance and Advocacy role of the local health department.
- Monitoring contract compliance of State vendors to assure needed services are available and

provided.

- Local health departments provide training to assist in assuring compliance with state and local laws and rules.

## **CRITICAL OPERATIONAL COMPONENTS FOR LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENTS**

Three operational components are crucial for excellence in the performance of local public health department roles and maximum responsiveness to the daily needs of citizens (Part 2433). These components result in rapid and appropriate response to: disasters from weather, contamination, poor planning, bio-terrorist incidents, other imminent danger (Part 2453) and outbreaks of disease (Part 2451).

- 1. A strong organizational base** is created from a suitably sized constituency. It is within geographic boundaries that allow easy service access and are politically and culturally sensitive. Financial strength requires both a stable funding base, and state and local appropriations that adequately provide for the core functions and essential public health services.
- 2. Qualified staff** includes professional disciplines with expertise in health administration, medical science, epidemiology, nursing, nutrition, health education, environmental health, and computer systems. Resources should be available locally to recruit, train, and retain knowledgeable, experienced staff. A system for attaining public health skills, continued competencies, and new skill development is essential.
- 3. Access to technology** is needed by local health departments to drive efficiencies, responsiveness, and greater productivity as it has done in other sectors. A sound information systems infrastructure that applies current technology is required.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Michigan's Constitution makes the public's health a primary concern to the legislature. Changes in the fabric of Michigan life over the past twenty years are challenging the public's health. The health of Michigan's residents depends on a protective network of local public health departments. The challenges that can be addressed by Michigan's legislature are these:

1. Seek first the common wellbeing in public health policy; strengthen positive relationships between state and local governments to foster the joint mission of public health.
2. Maintain a seamless safety net of health related services; work to decrease fragmentation and gaps and shape service-oriented health delivery.
3. Protect public health core functions and essential services; avoid shifts in funding away from traditional areas of responsibility for local public health departments without assurance that other organizations will meet or exceed established standards.
4. Assign resources to deliver core functions and essential services; avoid fragmented funding of core and essential services and the organizational foundation for local health departments.
5. Address increased resource demands; avoid unfunded mandates, address increased personnel demands for additional collaborative planning, stabilize funding around core functions and essential public health services.

6. Sustain public confidence in quality of and access to health services; help stem the tide locally of decreasing consumer access and trust of the medical care system in the midst of this generations' most massive health care changes.
7. Address basic health insurance needs; numbers of under- and uninsured Michigan residents continue to grow.

## CONCLUSION

The health of Michigan communities can be improved. Ten elements must be present and performing well in each community for this improvement to occur. A strong operational base, qualified staff, and access to technology are the foundation of any local health department. Local health departments are essential to perform assessment, policy development, and assurance roles.

No other entity has the legal mandate or universal charge to protect and enhance the public's health. There is no substitute.

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<sup>1</sup>Public Act 368 of 1978 State of Michigan

<sup>2</sup>Public Health in America, Public Health Function Steering Committee, Fall 1994.  
[www.health.gov/phfunctions/public.htm](http://www.health.gov/phfunctions/public.htm) (January 1, 2000)

<sup>3</sup>The Future of Public Health, Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D. C., 1987

<sup>4</sup>Healthy Communities: New Partnerships for the Future of Public Health, Institute of Medicine, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1996.

<sup>5</sup>Washington State Core Government Public Health Functions Task Force. Core Public Health Functions: A Progress Report. Washington State Department of Health, January 1993.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Institute of Medicine, 1987

<sup>7</sup>Koplin A. The Future of Public Health: A Local Health Department View. Journal of Health Policy Winter 1990: 442.

<sup>8</sup>Scutchfield and Keck. The Future of Public Health. Principles of Public Health Practice (Delmar – Division of Thompson International Publishing, Albany, N.Y.) 1996: 370-372.

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