



## Definition of local public health: What can Missourians expect?

### Public health mandate

Since 1920, public health has been defined as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities and individuals<sup>1</sup>. Local public health departments are given authority by state or local laws to create and maintain conditions that protect and promote the health of the public<sup>2</sup>, and should be held accountable for doing so.

### Local variation is inevitable

Organizational structure, funding mechanism, and access to resources vary from one local public

#### Ten Essential Public Health Services

1. Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems.
2. Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community.
3. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.
4. Mobilize community partnerships and action 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 ensure safety.
7. Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.
8. Assure competent public 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.

health department to the next, as does the composition of the local public health system surrounding each one.

Missouri's communities are also unique, each with its own opportunities, challenges, and priorities; therefore, public health service delivery will take a different form in different locations. However, in spite of these differences, all local public health departments are responsible for the mandate to protect and promote the public's health.

### Responsibility of local public health departments

According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM), public health has the mandate and the skills to develop an evidence-based understanding of population health needs, and can develop strategies and collaborations to address these needs<sup>3</sup>.

Within the broad context of this definition, local public health departments across the country have been working with the National Association of City and County Health Officers (NACCHO), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Public Health Accreditation Board, IOM, and others to develop a working definition of public health and a guiding framework for the responsibilities of local public health systems. Consensus has been reached that in order to be fully functioning, the local public health department must provide assessment, assurance, and policy development in relation to the Ten Essential Public Health Services<sup>4</sup> (see sidebar). The functional local health department must:

- Assess whether residents in their jurisdiction have access to these services;

- Assure access to all ten essential services by working with partners who provide any of these services within their jurisdiction; and
- Work with policy makers within their jurisdiction to put appropriate policies in place to guarantee these services for their residents.

The IOM urges public health departments to work with clinical care providers to develop adequate alternative capacity for clinical care services (i.e., outside health departments). The report also calls for public health department funds for clinical care services to shift to population-based services (after clinical care moves out).

### Capacity and leadership

The strength of a public health system rests on its overall capacity to effectively deliver the Ten Essential Public Health Services. NACCHO urges local public health departments to embrace a minimum package of public health services, in which fundamental capabilities are exercised across all major service areas (see Figure 1). In order to ensure that the full range of services is being provided, each local public health department should undergo the process of preparing for and seeking and maintaining accreditation from the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB)<sup>5</sup>. Through the process of measuring themselves against established standards, health departments demonstrate areas of excellence and identify areas for improvement. In addition to seeking accreditation, each local public health department should be led by a Certified Public Health Administrator. This will ensure that the person charged with leading the public health department in delivering public health services has the knowledge and skills necessary to do so effectively.

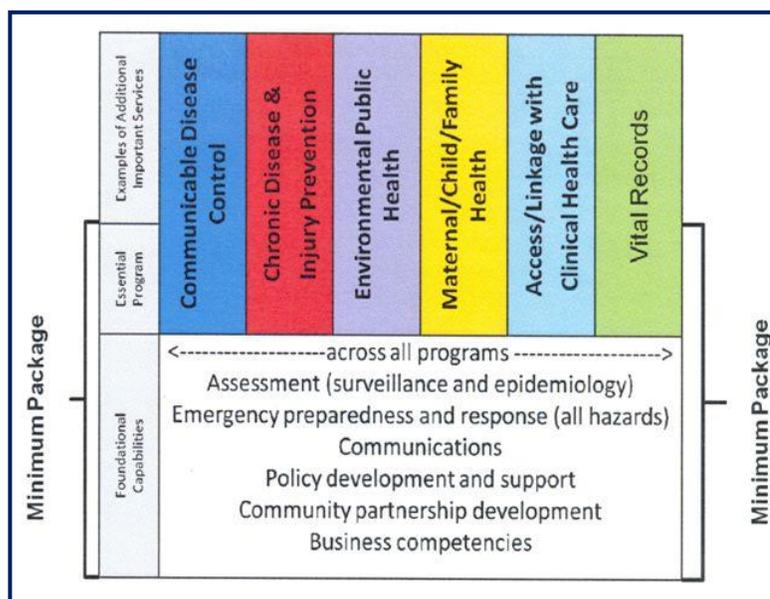


Figure 1. Minimum package of public health services for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### What can Missourians expect from local public health?

In light of the standards outlined above, all Missouri residents should benefit from the same types and quality of local public health services, regardless of where they live. Just as the public knows what services to expect when a physician, nurse, hospital, or chiropractor hangs a sign on their door, so should the public know what services to expect when a local public health department sign is displayed. While there will undoubtedly be local variation in how these activities are carried out, residents throughout Missouri should see their local health departments assessing the health of the community. They should see policies being developed and partnerships being formed within the community to address the pressing priorities identified through assessment and monitoring of local health issues. Our statewide drop in life expectancy would end and we would again begin to see increases in life

expectancy. Residents should see the local health department actively preparing for emergencies, and guiding residents in doing the same. And they should be confident in the ability of their public health leaders to manage these activities effectively and efficiently, for the good of the public's health. Local public health departments that carry out these activities are providing the ten essential public health services and fulfilling the mandate to protect and promote health.

Any organization that does not meet these requirements should not be considered a fully functioning local public health department and should strive to meet these standards. A growing number of local health departments, including MOC PHE members, are having difficulty meeting these standards due to size, isolation, limited funding, and/or lack of leadership and training. If this situation persists, having too many health departments who do not meet these criteria will weaken the overall public health system by stretching resources too thin and making the system inefficient and ineffective. Local public health departments, regardless of their size, should collaborate, coordinate, and merge forces with surrounding departments to ensure that residents have access to quality public health services and the overall public health system is strengthened.

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> Winslow CE-A. (1920). The untilled field of public health. *Modern Medicine*, 2:183–91.
- <sup>2</sup> NACCHO. (2005). *Operational definition of a functional local public health department*. Available at: <http://www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/accreditation/OpDef.cfm>
- <sup>3</sup> Institute of Medicine. (2010). *For the public's health: Investing in a healthier future*. Available at: <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2012/For-the-Publics-Health-Investing-in-a-Healthier-Future.aspx>
- <sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). *10 Essential Public Health Services*. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nphsp/essentialservices.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Public Health Accreditation Board. (2012). Available at: <http://www.phaboard.org/>