Agenda for Change Action Plan

FOR WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK

OVERVIEW

WINTER 2013

The greatest health threats Washingtonians face are changing, and our public health system needs to change as well. Even as we continue our core work of preventing the spread of communicable diseases and ensuring our drinking water and food are safe, we face a rising tide of new, costly and preventable conditions like obesity, diabetes and tobacco-driven cancer and heart disease. In fact, this generation of children is the first to have a lower life expectancy than their parents. These critical challenges demand that we develop a coherent approach that puts the public health needs of the community first.

All Washingtonians should have the opportunity to live long, healthy lives regardless of geography; education; income level; race; ethnicity; sexual orientation; or physical, mental, or emotional abilities. While data shows improvements overall, there are groups of people suffering from health problems above and beyond the population as a whole; as well as getting care and services that are lower quality, if they are receiving them at all. Achieving health equity is a public health priority as local public health agencies, tribes, and the state work to identify health disparities and implement strategies to eliminate them.

Washington has a public health network that is ideally positioned to meet the community health challenges of today, given adequate and consistent resources. We can bring down medical costs by helping people make healthy choices where they live, learn, work and play, and Washington can be a state where residents live longer, healthier and more productive lives.

Together with the Public Health Improvement Partnership, the Department of Health has produced an **Agenda for Change Action Plan**. The plan provides the guidance needed to ensure that we continue to protect and improve the health of people in Washington and proposes to transform our public health network through three approaches:

- **Foundational Public Health Services**
- **Strategic Priorities**
- **Transform Business Processes**

The **Agenda for Change Action Plan** will drive the course of change for public health in Washington for the next three to five years. It focuses on achievable actions we can begin now in full recognition of the current resource challenges in governmental public health. Each community and agency can use it as a guide in their own planning process.

The plan defines strategies that are applicable for individual governmental agencies and the system overall; for policy makers at the community and state level; and for our essential partners. Working with partners and convening community groups to help define and address local health problems is vital, especially with populations experiencing disparities.

Foundational Public Health Services

Ensure every resident in Washington can access a set of foundational public health services, no matter where he or she lives. Similar to public safety (fire and law enforcement), public utilities (power, water) and public infrastructure (roads, sewer), foundational public health services must be in place everywhere in order to work anywhere.

The *Agenda for Change* introduces a new concept: residents can access a foundational set of services supported by adequate and predictable funding. These foundational services are necessary but not sufficient. Just like the foundations of buildings support the larger structure, the Foundational Public Health Services support other standalone federal or fee supported programs, like emergency preparedness and response, food safety inspections, and diabetes prevention.

Strategic Priorities

Prioritize our work so the public health network is working together to confront emerging challenges. Clear goals, targeted objectives, and strategies for next steps are in place and specific actions and measures to gauge progress are being developed and implemented. For example, the *Agenda for Change* helps us focus on the most important elements of:

Preventing Communicable Disease and Other Health Threats

- Increase Immunization rates for all age groups
- Prioritize communicable disease tracking, monitoring, and response focusing on activities most critical to protect the public's health

Fostering Healthy Communities and Environments

- Implement policy, environmental and systems changes that:
  - Give babies a planned, healthy start in life
  - Prevent and reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences
  - Help adults make healthy choices for themselves and their families

Public Health Partnering with the Health Care System

- Convene interested parties to develop community health needs assessments, and foster regional health improvement alliances

Transform Business Processes

Just as the health care system is changing through health care reform to better meet current challenges, the public health network must also undergo reform. This includes taking steps to ensure our workforce has the necessary skills and competencies to address new challenges, adopting the best of both private and public sector management into our operations, and developing a long-term strategy for predictable and appropriate levels of financing.

Health is important to all of us, yet we have limited resources so we must use them wisely. The Agenda for Change Action Plan describes our vision for the future of public health in Washington. We look forward to working with policy makers and partners as we move forward with implementation.