

# AN OVERVIEW

*April 2013*

In 1993, as part of healthcare reform efforts, and again in 1995, the Legislature approved legislation (RCW 43.70.520 and 580) that recognized the significant and distinct role of public health. The law required the Washington State Department of Health, in consultation with other partners, to develop a public health services improvement plan. The intent was to develop a safe and healthy population and provide specific guidance and funding to improve the public health system. The Public Health Improvement Plan was to be updated and presented at the beginning of each new biennium and was to include:

- Definition of minimum standards for public health protection
- Recommended strategies and a schedule for improving public health programs
- Identification of key population health outcomes and capacity needed to improve these
- Distribution of state funds intended to improve the capacity of the public health system
- Criteria to assess the degree to which capacity is being achieved and ensure compliance by public health agencies

## IMPLEMENTATION

The laws passed in 1993 and 1995 included budget provisos to appropriate new state general funds to be distributed to each local health jurisdiction. The funds were initially called 'Urgent Need Funds.' Each local health agency was to identify and use the funds for its highest priority needs. Later, these funds became known as the Local Capacity Development Funds (LCDF) and continue to be one of the few flexible funding streams to local public health.

Initially, \$10 million was allocated per biennium for LCDF. In 1995, the amount increased to about \$16 million per biennium. Local health agencies agreed to pool some of the LCDF fund for 'system wide' improvements. These funds (about \$225,000 per year) were named the Partnership Funds and are used to help fund public health improvement work. In addition, the State Department of Health contributes funding and staff support; partner organizations contribute resources, and grants periodically provide additional funding.

## THE PARTNERSHIP - THEN AND NOW

The **Public Health Improvement Partnership** operates on principles of shared leadership and governance among the partners. The results have affected every public health agency across the state, have strengthened the public health system and improved our ability to protect the public's health. Through the Public Health Improvement Partnership, leaders are able to work together, set vision for the future, focus on public health priorities, and direct resources to where they are most critically needed to improve and protect health.

Over the years, the work and structure of the Partnership have evolved as follows:

### 1994 - 2009

Until 2009, the partnership consisted of representatives from organizations such as the NW Center for Public Health Practice (UW School of Public Health and Community Medicine), Washington Health Foundation, Washington State American Indian Health Commission, Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials, Washington State Board of Health, Washington State Department of Health and the Washington State Public Health Association.

The work was carried out by committees. Each addressed an element from the vision statement - performance management, key health indicators, activities and services, communications, public health finance, workforce development, information technology, and access to care.

### 2010 - 2012

In late 2009, the Partnership was reorganized to better align with then current environment and available resources. The partner list focused on governmental public health and included members from the Washington State Board of Health, Washington State Department of Health, Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials, local public health agencies, local boards of health, tribal nations, Washington State American Indian Health Commission and the US Public Health Service, Region 10.

Major efforts undertaken by the Partnership's workgroups between 2010 and 2012 have been the annual public health activities and services inventories, biennial local public health indicators update, the fourth public health standards statewide review and the development of an action plan based on the 2010 *Agenda for Change*. In 2012, the Public Health Improvement Partnership adopted the *Agenda for Change Action Plan* as its guiding document for the next two years – the 2012 Public Health Improvement Plan.

### 2013 - 2014

The Partnership will continue to build a culture of accountability and quality improvement; measure and improve public health services, and strengthen the public health system to address the demands of changing environment in Washington State.

The 2012 Public Health Improvement Plan charts the following roadmap for the next two years:

- Commit to health equity
- Focus on strategic priorities
- Develop foundational public health services
- Modernize business practices
- Identify essential partners

The Partnership also revised its structure to carry out the implementation of the *Agenda for Change Action Plan*. The new format will focus specific efforts around:

- Prevention
- Fostering healthy communities and environments
- Efficiently partnering with the health care system
- Eliminating disparities
- Creating a model for a stable funding foundation

## WORK PRODUCTS AND TOOLS

- The **Agenda for Change Action Plan** will drive the course of change for public health in Washington for the next two to five years. It focuses on achievable actions in full recognition of the current resource challenges in governmental public health.
- This effort is focused on developing a long-term strategy for predictable and appropriate levels of financing public health. **Foundational public health services** have been defined as **core capacities, activities, and services** that should comprise the foundation of public health services available in Washington and funded by state and local flexible funds.
- The 2007 Legislature directed public health officials to identify a list of core public health activities and services delivered by the governmental public health system across the state. Since 2008, a **Public Health Activities and Services Inventory** is administered on annual bases. Results from each count are used to help evaluate and report on the work conducted by the system and will be used to develop performance measures.
- Washington's Public Health Improvement Plan requires local measurement of health status or determinants of health. The **Local Public Health Indicators** provide a snapshot of health status, health behavior, and public health system performance at the local level. Local public health agencies use the data to help evaluate their work and decide where to invest limited public health resources to improve community health.
- The **Public Health Standards** are measures that evaluate the performance of Washington's public health system. They define public health processes and responsibilities that communities need and measure the capacity of public health agencies to provide these processes and responsibilities. While the standards were originally jointly written by local and state public health representatives, in 2011 Washington State adopted the **National Public Health Accreditation Board's** set of standards for voluntary accreditation.