

Letter from the Assistant Secretary



Spring and summer are always a time of renewal. This year brings change to the Washington State Department of Health. Secretary Mary Selecky retired after leading the agency since 1998. To replace her, Gov. Jay Inslee appointed John Wiesman, director of Clark County Public Health.

Secretary Selecky made a lasting mark during her time in office. She always kept her focus on making the state safer and healthier. Secretary Selecky put a strong emphasis on ensuring that the people who treat patients are qualified, and that they work in safe facilities.

Like Secretary Selecky, Secretary Wiesman has a robust background in local public health. Much of his early work was in the HIV/AIDS field, so he understands the importance of preventing and attacking deadly disease. As an administrator, Secretary Wiesman has a reputation for innovative, creative leadership – sometimes during difficult financial circumstances.

I've worked with Secretary Wiesman on the [Agenda for Change](#) project, which provides a blueprint for public health's future in Washington. It aims at preventing problems before they become costly and lethal. He's a thoughtful, approachable man with a passion for what he does. And he has his predecessor's endorsement. "John has terrific public health experiences and leadership skills that will serve him well as secretary of health," Secretary Selecky said when the governor announced his appointment. That's high praise from a nationally acclaimed leader.

As we look forward, people in Washington can do so knowing the Department of Health is in good hands.

Take care!

Karen Jensen

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Department of Health receives accreditation

It's always nice to be in the vanguard. Once again, the Washington State Department of Health is in that category.

The agency is one of the nation's first two state health departments accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), then-Secretary Mary Selecky announced Feb. 28. The Oklahoma State Department of Health is the other. Nine local and regional public health departments around the country, including the Spokane Regional Health District, also received accreditation.

The department took part in a pilot project as the accreditation board tried out the initial measurements. It participated in testing how the review and approval process worked. The agency subsequently submitted its application for accreditation, and in October it hosted a team of accreditation board site visitors. Those visitors met with employees to hear about the agency's work, to detail where the department was meeting the standards, and to provide advice on ways to improve.

"It's been a lot of work for a lot of people and programs all around our agency," then-Secretary Selecky said. "I'm as proud as I could possibly be. This is a major accomplishment for all us, and more important, for the people of our state. It shows that we have the programs and measures in place so that we can meet our community's needs as effectively as possible."

This accreditation means the agency meets or exceeds the rigorous standards established by the non-profit, non-governmental Public Health Accreditation Board.

Search function gets simpler

The Washington State Department of Health's 2012 website upgrade made the site simpler to use. Now the new "USA Search" tool improves it more. It's faster, more thorough (for instance, results include Twitter and Facebook posts) and easier to customize. The search box is in the upper right corner of the department's [home page](#). The agency's Web team aims to improve the tool and the site in general, so if you have any comments, please [make a suggestion](#).

Survey delivers varying picture of state youths' overall health

A new edition of the [Healthy Youth Survey](#) delivers mixed results about the well-being of Washington's young people. Fewer adolescents smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, but fewer also believe marijuana use is risky – and a significant number have seriously considered taking their own lives.

The Washington State Department of Health is among sponsors of the survey, conducted every two years. More than 200,000 students statewide took the survey in October of 2012. Youngsters in sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th grades answered questions.

Cigarette smoking is down in all grades, but some young people also use hookahs and cigars. Nearly twice as many high schoolers smoke marijuana as smoke cigarettes. Although alcohol use declined from 2010 to 2012, the percentage of students who use alcohol grows steadily from eighth grade through 12th.

About one in every six students ages 12-17 admitted having seriously considered suicide. That level has stayed steady for a decade. But fewer students say they've skipped school and more say they feel safe there. Nearly a third of sophomores and more than half of seniors say they've had sex.

The Department of Health and its partners use the survey results to plan, carry out and test state youth programs.

Defense agency seeks state's help in streamlining credential process

The U.S. Department of Defense wants to make it easier for state licensing agencies to decide whether military service members merit health care provider credentials. It's seeking the Washington State Department of Health's help to make the project work more effectively.

Defense plans to create a Joint Service Transcript to standardize content. It will also improve the way it formats and presents information. The form will replace the separate transcripts each service now uses. That will make it easier to evaluate service members' education, training and experience as state agencies decide whether to issue credentials.

The federal agency's first goal is to make the transcript as uniform as possible. Its second goal is to make it as helpful as possible for its intended audiences. Those include state licensing authorities, which must determine whether applicants meet state standards.

Toward those ends, Defense is surveying the Department of Health, among others, for advice. It wants to learn about the document's usefulness to state licensing agencies. It's also seeking feedback from education and national certification organizations.

The department's Health Systems Quality Assurance division oversees the work in Washington.

Online license renewals available in nearly all health professions

In recent years, people have gotten accustomed to doing many tasks electronically -- shopping, banking, ordering prescriptions, making travel arrangements and much more. Now, nearly everyone who has a Washington healthcare provider credential may renew over the Internet.

That means providers no longer need to visit the Department of Health's Tumwater campus or use the mail to keep their credentials current. An Internet connection is all they require.

Nearly 350,000 credential holders may renew online. Limited online license renewal began early in 2012. Professions joined the program in 15 phases.

Overdose deaths on the rise among women, CDC report indicates

Drug overdose deaths among women increased steadily from 1999 to 2010, according to a report the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued in July.

Research shows that although overdoses kill more men than women, opioid pain reliever-caused deaths have increased faster among women – growing fivefold as opposed to 3.6 times for men. Since 2007, overdoses have killed more women each year than motor vehicle crashes have.

The CDC recommends that health care providers follow guidelines when prescribing pain medication. That includes screening for and monitoring substance abuse and mental health problems.

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