

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF A FUNCTIONAL LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY

Draft G4.3

April 12, 2005

Introduction

All local public health agencies (LPHAs*), as governmental entities, derive their authority and power from the state and local laws that govern them. Accordingly, all LPHAs exist for the common good and are responsible for demonstrating strong leadership in the promotion of social, economic and environmental conditions that improve health and well-being and prevent illness, disease and injury. However, in the absence of specific, consistent standards regarding how LPHAs fulfill this responsibility, the degree to which the public's health is protected and improved varies widely from community to community.

This definition is composed of standards, framed around the nationally-recognized Ten Essential Public Health Services, that describe what every person, regardless of where they live, should reasonably expect their LPHA to meet. The standards provide a framework by which LPHAs are accountable to the public they serve and to the governing bodies (e.g., local boards of health) to which they report. In meeting the standards, it is imperative that LPHAs operate according to the highest level of professionalism and ethics to inspire public confidence and trust.

The capacity and the authority of the governmental public health presence at the local level vary widely, and as a result, how LPHAs perform public health functions to meet the standards will also vary. For example, with respect to capacity, the LPHA may perform all of the functions on its own; it may call upon the state to provide assistance for some functions; it may develop arrangements with other organizations in the community or with neighboring LPHAs to perform some functions; or it may control the means by which other organizations perform some functions. With respect to authority, sometimes other governmental entities perform some public health functions (e.g., environmental health). In these instances, the LPHA continues to have a leadership role in meeting the standards associated with the functions: the LPHA informs and influences the other governmental efforts, identifies any shortcomings in meeting the associated standards, and leads efforts to fill in gaps. Regardless of the capacity and specific authority of the LPHA in any community, however, their responsibility to lead governmental public health in meeting the standards is constant.

The standards are intended to provide consistency with respect to the fundamental functions performed by LPHAs, but the structural characteristics of LPHAs (e.g., governance, staffing patterns, size of the population served, etc.) will continue to vary, and each LPHA may be required to perform functions unique to meeting the public health needs of the community it serves. Finally, embedded throughout the definition are ways in which the LPHA works with other members of the local public health system (comprising all those entities that contribute to the public's health, e.g., public and private health care providers, community organizations, schools, media, and businesses). LPHAs are the natural leaders in the development of a cohesive local public health system, working at times as leader, convener, partner, collaborator, enabler, or evaluator.

*For the purposes of this definition, an LPHA is defined as the governmental public health presence at the local level. It may be a locally-governed health department; a branch of the state health department; a state-created district or region; a department governed by and serving a multi-county area; or any other arrangement that has governmental authority and is responsible for public health functions at the local level.

Essential Public Health Service 1: Monitor health status to identify community health problems

1. Obtain data that provide information on the community's health (e.g., provider immunization rates; hospital discharge data; environmental health hazard, risk and exposure data; community-specific data, etc.)
2. Develop relationships with local providers and others in the community who have information on reportable diseases and other conditions of public health interest and facilitate information exchange
3. Conduct or contribute expertise to periodic community health assessments in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the public's health
4. Integrate data with other health assessment and data collection efforts conducted by the public health system
5. Analyze data to identify trends and population health risks
6. Use data as the basis for other LPHA functions

Essential Public Health Service 2: Diagnose and investigate identified health problems and health hazards in the community

1. Use community health data for strategic planning and response activities
2. Identify, investigate and respond to health problems and environmental health hazards in order to prevent, minimize, and contain adverse health events and conditions resulting from communicable diseases; food-, water, and vector-borne outbreaks; chronic diseases; environmental health hazards; biological, chemical and radiological threats; and public health disasters
3. Identify, and advocate for changes in, social and economic conditions that adversely affect the public's health
4. Maintain policies and technology required for urgent communications
5. Generate, receive and distribute public health alerts to the general public, health care providers, appropriate responders and local, state and federal agencies
6. Lead public health emergency planning and response activities in the community, coordinating the roles of other local, state and federal agencies.
7. Fully participate in planning and response for other emergencies in the community in a manner consistent with the community's best public health interest
8. Maintain access to laboratory expertise and capacity to help monitor community health status and diagnose and investigate public health problems and hazards

Essential Public Health Service 3: Inform, educate and empower people about health issues

1. Exchange culturally-appropriate information and data with individuals, community groups, other agencies and the general public to understand the social, economic, environmental and other issues affecting the public's health

2. Engage the community around health issues to understand the issues confronting the community and to promote the community's understanding of, and advocacy for, policies and activities that will improve the public's health
3. Provide targeted, culturally-appropriate information to help individuals understand what decisions they can make to be healthy
4. Conduct health promotion activities to improve the health status of the community.
5. Work with the media to convey information of public health significance

Essential Public Health Service 4: Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems

1. Lead, or contribute expertise to, a comprehensive planning process that engages the community in identifying, prioritizing and solving their public health problems and establishing goals for the public's health
2. Support and implement strategies that address identified public health problems through partnerships of public and private organizations, government agencies, businesses, schools, and the media.
3. Develop partnerships to generate interest in and support for improved community health status, including new and emerging public health issues

Essential Public Health Service 5: Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts

1. Serve as a primary resource to guide local, state, and federal elected and appointed officials to establish and maintain sound public health policies, practices and capacity
2. Lead and join policy development efforts to improve physical, social and environmental conditions in the community that affect the public's health
3. Engage in strategic planning to develop a vision, mission and guiding principles that reflect the community's public health needs, and to prioritize services and programs

Essential Public Health Service 6: Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety

1. Know and apply existing public health law, ordinances, and regulations to protect the public's health
2. Educate policymakers on outdated notions and gaps in public health law, ordinances and regulations needed to protect the public's health
3. Inform and educate individuals and organizations of the meaning, purpose and benefit of public health laws, regulations and ordinances and how to comply
4. Monitor, and analyze over time, the compliance of regulated organizations, entities and individuals
5. Conduct enforcement activities

Essential Public Health Service 7: Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable

1. Lead or join efforts to increase access to culturally competent, appropriate and equitable personal health services, including preventive and health promotion services
2. Partner with the community to establish systems to meet critical health services needs
3. Partner with the community to identify and establish systems that assure prevention
4. Link individuals to available, accessible personal health care providers
5. Where applicable, serve as provider of last resort

Essential Public Health Service 8: Assure a competent public health and personal health care workforce

1. Recruit, train, develop and retain a diverse staff.
2. Evaluate LPHA staff members' public health competencies, and address deficiencies through continuing education, training and leadership development activities
3. Apply core public health competencies to the recruitment, training and development of the LPHA workforce.
4. Provide the public health workforce with access to the training and tools needed to do their job
5. Provide practice-based educational experiences for the future public health workforce, and provide expertise in developing and teaching public health curricula, through partnerships with academia
6. Promote the use of effective public health practices among other practitioners and agencies engaged in public health interventions

Essential Public Health Service 9: Assess effectiveness, accessibility and quality of personal and population-based health services

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies implemented through the comprehensive health planning process to achieve the identified public health goals
2. Evaluate the effectiveness and quality of all local public health agency programs and activities against evidence-based criteria and use the information to improve performance and community health outcomes
3. Review the effectiveness of public health interventions provided by other practitioners and agencies for prevention, containment and/or remediation of problems affecting the public's health

Essential Public Health Service 10: Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

1. Using current data, or implement evidence-based public health programs
2. When researchers approach the health department to engage in research activities that benefit the health of the community,
 - a. Work with them to actively involve the community in all phases of research;
 - b. Provide data and expertise to support research; and
 - c. Facilitate their efforts to share research findings with the community
3. Contribute to the evidence base of public health and the identification of best practices by sharing results of research and program evaluations with other public health practitioners