

INSIDE BROCHURE LANGUAGE:

Public health works every day to strengthen communities by preventing illness and improving health v5.25.12

What do local health departments do for your community?

PREVENT

Local health departments help prevent the start and spread of outbreaks and disease. We:

- **Keep food and physical environments safe.** Restaurant food we eat, hotels we visit and daycares where our children play are all safer thanks to local health departments. We also minimize health hazards such as lead and water pollution.
- **Help prevent the occurrence and spread of disease.** Local health departments work with healthcare and community partners to prevent and target the cause of disease outbreaks, and then determine the appropriate response.
- **Prepare for and respond to disasters and emergencies.** Local health departments work with emergency management and other local officials to plan for and respond to natural disasters, novel disease outbreaks, and bioterrorism threats that can dramatically impact health.

Example. North Carolina's State Fair drew national attention last year after an *E coli* outbreak resulted in 27 cases, spanning 7 counties, resulting in 5 hospitalized in serious condition and 4 on dialysis. The investigation took boots on the ground...health departments who participated in the investigation, monitored local hospitals and doctors' offices, informed the public, and helped to contain the incident.

PROMOTE

Local health departments promote healthy communities. We assure a healthcare safety net and champion proven practices to foster better health for everyone. We know prevention works and access to health services cuts costs for everyone. We:

- **Promote better health throughout the lifespan.** We help young people stay well and develop into healthy adults. We offer education and services to help reduce chronic illness and complications. A healthy community leads to a more productive workforce, reduced healthcare costs, and a better quality of life.
- **Assure access to quality health care services.** We evaluate and augment the health service capacity of the community, including: care for pregnant women, immunizations for all ages, and dental care for children.

Example. In 2010, North Carolina's infant mortality rate declined sharply to the lowest level in state history. The current rate represents an 11.4 percent drop in the state's infant mortality rate. The trend underscores the impact of public health programs aimed at improving birth outcomes and maternal and child health.

PROTECT

Local health departments protect community health and economic vitality through public health policy and community partnerships. We:

- **Uphold policies we know improve our community's health.** Better foods in our schools, more physical activity, and smoke-free places are examples of policies that have a major impact on the health of our children and neighbors. A healthy community has greater potential for positive economic growth.
- **Continuously assess needs and improve capacity to promote better health.** Whether assessing community health, implementing quality improvement efforts, or pursuing accreditation, local health departments maximize opportunities to improve public health practice and the public's health.

Example. North Carolina's smoke-free restaurants and bars law is both effective and popular. This policy change is contributing to a 21 percent decrease in emergency room visits for heart attacks, improving air quality by 89 percent in those venues, and earning high approval ratings in a recent poll.

Investing in North Carolina's health: **What makes local health departments strong and effective?**

A solid foundation of funding and expertise

SOLID FOUNDATION

- **Continued local support with sustained and flexible funding.** Promoting and protecting our community's health is essential to quality of life and to the economic vitality of our communities. Now more than ever, adequate financial support is necessary to make local health departments strong and ready to respond to community needs.
- **Executives equipped with training and expertise to lead a local health department.** Managing a health department requires strategic vision, detailed understanding of public health program requirements and best practices, and strong and sustained community relationships.
- **Active and engaged local boards of health for health departments across North Carolina.** Since 1877, board of health member volunteers and content experts have served their communities, providing public oversight, advising and deciding on public health policy, depoliticizing public health, and promoting fiscal accountability. Maintaining this governance structure is critical to a local health department's success in our state.

Support for local public health's infrastructure

INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Local facilities to ensure access to public health services.** In many communities, local health departments are essential providers of primary care, maternal and child health services, and nutritional services for our working poor and for others without insurance. Facilities must be located within our communities to help ensure access to these and other public health services.
- **Health information technology to better target and improve the quality of prevention and patient care and to reduce health care costs.** Local health departments need powerful health information technologies to provide a true medical home for its patients, to avoid duplication of services, to enhance staff productivity, and to better target public health priorities.
- **Trained and experienced public health professionals.** These experts know which interventions work and how to implement them in their community. They can respond quickly to a fast-moving, changing public health environment. Nurses, health educators and environmental health specialists are some of the experts within our public health workforce.

Strong and coordinated collaboration

PARTNERSHIPS

- **Collaboration with community partners to ensure that public health programs are effective.** Our schools, churches, businesses, nonprofits, and medical professionals are all partners who have a fundamental interest and role in maintaining a healthy community. Local public health departments serve at the core of coordinating these collaborations.
 - **Continued commitment from every level of government to support the mission of public health.** Strong support and coordination must be prioritized if local health departments are to continue providing many of the programs and services that have established NC as a national model of public health.
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