



# Considerations for Leveraging the Value of Local Public Health in Local Organizational Change



County and city government agencies are organized in various ways throughout Minnesota to meet the unique needs of their local communities. Over time, changes to these organizational structures are often necessary to meet the evolving nature of our communities. This document can help inform and guide considerations that may involve local public health agencies (for an in-depth resource, see: the “Blueprint for Successful Local Public Health Departments,” [Blueprint Report](#)).

## The Unique Role of Local Public Health

No matter how public health services are delivered, or what structure they exist within, local public health is vital to a robust community. Public Health is not only a series of programs in a local organizational structure; it is a key area in local government that serves everyone. While some services are targeted, much of the work of Public Health focuses on the entire population. And uniquely, Public Health has a long and successful track record of a true a state/local partnership with flexibility to meet local needs.

Maintaining a Public Health capacity at the local level is critical because [investment in Public Health saves lives and saves money](#). The following are key skill sets and perspectives local public health provides to local government:

### 1. Focus on the Needs of Populations

Public Health approaches its work through the lens of the “population.” This unique perspective guides the local assessment and planning process to help meet the needs of the local community. See: [Local Public Health System](#) for more information.

### 2. Partnership with the State

The local public health system has a long history in Minnesota (see: [Minnesota's Public Health System](#)). The state/local partnership, known as the Community Health Services (CHS) system, enables state and local governments to combine resources to serve public health needs in an efficient, cost-effective way.

### 3. Connecting with the Healthcare System

While half of deaths are linked to unhealthy behaviors, less than three percent of health care dollars are spent on promoting healthy behaviors and preventing problems before they occur. As healthcare reform continues, the role of prevention and “population health” will continue to be more critical in containing healthcare costs. [Local public health plays a key role in this effort at the local level](#).

### 4. Serving the Entire Community

Public Health serves the entire community with their work on the “social determinants of health” (see: [Improving Health: Counties are Key](#)) and broad health policies (see: [Health in All Policies](#)) at the local level.

# LPHA Recommendations

The following factors can help guide an organizational change process impacting Public Health at the local level and increase likelihood of a successful outcome (see: [CJS Roadmap](#) for one example):

## Establish Guiding Principles

Whether you use existing local Mission, Vision or Value statements as a foundation, or create “new” principles to guide a change, establishing guiding principles will help define and focus the discussions. It is recommended to assess progress and adjust throughout the process relative to these principles.

## Tap into Public Health Leadership

Rely on the expertise of your local public health leadership. The Minnesota Department of Health, [Office of Performance Improvement](#) can also provide assistance.

## Use Local Data

Decisions should be made based on local circumstances and evidence of need. Data, to the degree that it is available, should drive decisions at each step in the process.

## Engage Stakeholders

Given the complexity and nature of local government structures, it is important to identify and engage a variety of stakeholders as part of the process. Important players should be viewed broadly and may include, but aren't limited to: the local public health director; county administrator(s); other department heads *directly affected* by a possible change; local governing boards; state agency partners; community members; local unions; and additional public health staff.

## Assure Local Public Health Access to Decision Makers

Local public health leadership is a key resource for decision makers. Local public health leadership needs direct and regular access to local elected officials to assure they will have the best information available when making public health decisions.

## Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Communication with staff at regular intervals is critical to the success of organizational change. Open, honest, and consistent communication will help assure transparency throughout the process.

## Consider the Timing

Any organizational change takes an investment of time, in both planning and implementation. Keep in mind minimum statutory timelines for structural change. Sufficient time allocated to a major transition may take many months, if not years. Very likely, at least a one-year period will be required to support planning and implementation issues. A five-year plan may be useful.

## Evaluate

It is crucial to evaluate the impact of the change based on your goals and guiding principles, as well as the critical requirements of local public health.