

# Purpose and Practices of Public Health

## *Ten Essential Services*



### What Public Health Does (The Purpose of Public Health)

The fundamental obligation of agencies responsible for population-based health is to:

- Prevent epidemics and the spread of disease
- Protect against environmental hazards
- Prevent injuries
- Promote and encourage healthy behaviors and mental health
- Respond to disasters and assist communities in recovery
- Assure the quality and accessibility of health services

These responsibilities describe and define the function of public health in assuring the availability of quality health services. Both distinct from and encompassing clinical services, public health's role is to assure the conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives, through community-wide prevention and protection programs.

### How Public Health Serves (The Practice of Public Health)

Public health serves communities and individuals within them by providing an array of essential services. Many of these services are invisible to the public. Typically, the public only becomes aware of the need for public health services when a problem develops (e.g., an epidemic occurs). The *practice* of public health becomes the following ten "essential services":

1. **Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems:** This service includes accurate diagnosis of the community's health status; identification of threats to health and assessment of health service needs; timely collection, analysis, and publication of information on access, utilization, costs, and outcomes of personal health services; attention to the vital statistics and health status of specific-groups that are at higher risk than the total population; and collaboration to manage integrated information systems with private providers and health benefit plans.
2. **Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community:** This service includes epidemiologic identification of emerging health threats; public health laboratory capability using modern technology to conduct rapid screening and high volume testing; active infections disease epidemiology programs; and technical capacity for epidemiologic investigation of disease outbreaks and patterns of chronic disease and injury.
3. **Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues:** This service involves social marketing and targeted media public communication; providing accessible health information resources at community levels; active collaboration with personal health care providers to reinforce health promotion messages and programs; and join health education programs with schools, churches, and work-sites.
4. **Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems:** This service involves convening and facilitating community groups and associations, including those not typically considered to be health-related, in undertaking defined preventive, screening, rehabilitation, and support programs; and skilled coalition-building ability in order to draw upon the full range of potential human and material resources in the cause of community health.
5. **Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts:** This service requires leadership development at all levels of public health; systematic community-level and

state-level planning for health improvement in all jurisdictions; development and tracking of measurable health objectives as a part of continuous quality improvement strategies; joint evaluation with the medical health care system to define consistent policy regarding prevention and treatment services; and development of codes, regulations and legislation to guide the practice of public health.

6. **Enforce laws and regulations that protect health insurance and safety:** This service involves full enforcement of sanitary codes, especially in the food industry; full protection of drinking water supplies; enforcement of clean air standards; timely follow-up of hazards, preventable injuries, and exposure-related diseases identified in occupational and community settings; monitoring quality of medical services (e.g. laboratory, nursing homes, and home health care); and timely review of new drug, biologic, and medical device applications.
7. **Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable:** This service (often referred to as "outreach" or "enabling" services) includes assuring effective entry for socially disadvantaged people into a coordinated system of clinical care; culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and staff to assure linkage to services for special population groups; ongoing "care management"; transportation services; targeted health information to high risk population groups; and technical assistance for effective worksite health promotion/disease prevention programs.
8. **Assure a competent public and personal health care workforce:** This service includes education and training for personnel to meet the needs for public and personal health service; efficient processes for licensure of professionals and certification of facilities with regular verification and inspection follow-up; adoption of continuous quality improvement and life-long learning within all licensure and certification programs; active partnerships with professional training programs to assure community-relevant learning experiences for all students; and continuing education in management and leadership development programs for those charged with administrative/executive roles.
9. **Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services:** This service calls for ongoing evaluation of health programs, based on analysis of health status and service utilization data, to assess program effectiveness and to provide information necessary for allocating resources and shaping programs.
10. **Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems:** This service includes continuous linkage with appropriate institutions of higher learning and research and an internal capacity to mount timely epidemiologic and economic analyses and conduct needed health services outreach.

Note:

Members of the *Essential Services Work Group* Included representatives from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, National Association of County and City Health Officials, Institute of Medicine (National Academy of Sciences), Association of Schools of Public Health, Public Health Foundation, National Association of State Alcohol & Drug Abuse Directors, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, and Public Health Service.

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