

Dear Public Health Partners in Colorado:

We would like to take this opportunity to update you on the activities surrounding the implementation of the Public Health Act ([Senate Bill 08-194](#)). Since embarking on its new mandate on January 1, 2009, the Office of Planning and Partnerships at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment has undertaken many activities statewide along with local public health and the many organizations supporting public health improvement in Colorado. Below is a comprehensive update with some important deadlines. Even if you are not actively involved in the implementation we hope this update will inform you of the changes happening in the structure of our state's public health system.

New Office, New Staff

The State Board of Health and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) established the new **Office of Planning and Partnerships** to implement the Act, particularly to develop the statewide public health improvement plan. While our Office will take the lead in many areas, it is only through collective efforts that we can improve the public health system in Colorado. A number of organizations in addition to state and local public health agencies are involved: Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials ([CALPHO](#)), the [Public Health Alliance](#), and the new [Colorado School of Public Health's Center for Public Health Practice](#), are some of the many representing the public health professional organizations.

Much has been accomplished in the first 90 days within the Office and beyond:

- Funding provided by the [Caring for Colorado Foundation](#) in January to the Office of Planning and Partnerships has allowed us to hire two public health planners to join the staff of the former Office of Local Liaison to assist with implementation.
- Click here to meet the [Office of Planning and Partnerships staff](#).
- The [Public Health Act Advisory Group](#), chaired by Dr. Chris Urbina of Denver Health, is meeting monthly to advise the Office of Planning and Partnerships on implementation strategies. This group, originally brought together to plan the Public Health Summit held in December 2008, consists of representatives from local health departments, nursing services, environmental and public health officials, State Health Department leadership, the CALPHO and the State Board of Health.

Establishing Local or District Public Health Agencies

- The first priority has been to assist the 39 counties with nursing services to establish local or district public health agencies. We recently worked with the Purchasing and Contracts Section at CDPHE to inform all counties to complete this step of the Act as soon as possible as the process for approving next fiscal year's contracts begins this April. This information along with [sample resolutions](#) for designating local and district public health agencies was sent to all public health directors and nursing directors at the end of January. The Purchasing and Contracts Section has sent a reminder letter to all public health directors re-emphasizing that any changes to the name of an agency, signature authority, or change in scope of work will need to be submitted by April 15 to allow time to change their master contracts which includes agreements with most divisions within the Department (typically an 8 week process).
- Local public health departments and county nursing services have been working hard to meet the deadline. To date, over half of the counties have adopted or have drafted resolutions awaiting adoption by their boards of county commissioners. A number of

counties are planning to hold their hearings during [National Public Health Week](#), April 6-10. What a great idea to promote public health and their new name change! Given the tight timeline in the Act, many counties interested in regionalizing services or becoming district public health agencies are continuing their efforts to plan regionalized structures for the future.

Minimum Qualifications for Public Health Directors

- The State Board of Health has moved forward with a request to begin the rule making process at the March 18, 2009 meeting to establish minimum qualifications for public health directors and medical officers. This will begin a two-month process for stakeholder input, before a vote, the hearing will occur on May 20, 2009. A special thanks to Mark Johnson, Jefferson County; Jackie Brown, Prowers County and Jeff Stoll, Local Liaison for their work in drafting the proposal for the Advisory Group and its members' constituents to consider. The biggest challenge in this process has been to develop meaningful, consistent qualifications across the state, based on national standards, while respecting the limited resources of many counties. These qualifications will be a timely resource for new local public health agencies.
- For those interested in providing input to the State Board of Health regarding the Minimum Qualifications the draft notice will be submitted to the Secretary of State on March 31, 2009 for publication in the April 10, 2009 Colorado Register as well as our office website. Comments will be due to State Board of Health by Friday, May 1, 2009.

Statewide Public Health Improvement Plan Process

- Last, but not least is an update on the development of the Statewide Public Health Improvement Plan due to the State Board of Health in November. We are in the initial stages of forming a collaborative process to develop this Plan that includes many opportunities to incorporate input from local public health officials and other public health partners. This spring, we will begin forming small working groups based on the strategic priorities identified in [Community Dialogues](#) compiled in 2007 to develop initial drafts. We are asking the CALPHO/Public Health Alliance to organize larger groups this summer (many of you signed up to participate when registering for the Public Health Summit) to review and comment on these drafts.
- Establishing Core Services is a part of the Plan and most everyone is interested in knowing how and when these will be determined. There are more questions than answers, such as whether the core services include the basic services and other responsibilities in statute now; whether funding will be connected to the core services; whether the core services will be driven by local needs; etc. The first meeting working group will be concerning Core Services and they will be meeting in the next few weeks to develop a strategy for balancing the more conceptual ten essential services framework (desired by public health professionals) with specific operational services (desired by local boards of health and county commissioners). As their drafts become ready for review and input, we anticipate the need for education as part of the process to develop consensus around what is meant by Core Services and the components within these services.
- A compiled draft of the plan will be presented at the [Uniting Public Health](#) Conference. Public Health in the Rockies and the Colorado Environmental Health Association are teaming up this year to hold their conferences during the last week of September and are calling it the "Uniting Public Health" Conference. Taking advantage of the day that both Conferences are in session, Wednesday will be an independently facilitated process for reviewing, providing input and gaining support for the Statewide Public Health Improvement Plan. Conference planners are committed to continuing the theme of public health improvement throughout the week, as well as creating opportunities to further strengthen the relationships among environmental health and public health professionals.

- Following the acceptance of the Statewide Public Health Improvement Plan, the State Board of Health and our Office will work with county policy makers and local public health officials to establish core public health services and a formula for allocating appropriated state funds to local public health agencies, based on the strategic priorities and health status indicators of the Plan.

Personally, I have enjoyed traveling to the Western Slope to learn about West Central Collaborative Partnership and attending meetings of public health, nursing and environmental health directors in Pueblo, the San Luis Valley, and in the Denver metro area. We are continuing to listen and learn as we meet with our public health partners, all of whom are interested in finding out how their work or agency will be integrated into the statewide plan (WIC, Vital Records, Obesity Prevention, Adolescent Health, Consumer Protection, Emergency Preparedness, Medical Home, Chronic Disease among others) and how the Plan can be coordinated with other agencies such as Health Care Policy and Finance.

The Public Health Act builds on the substantial work in Colorado and nationally to improve the public health system. As Václav Havel once said, **“Vision is not enough, it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps; we must step up the stairs.”**

Please contact us at the Office of Planning and Partnerships at the following email address.
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Again, note that you can find more information about the Act at the web site of the Office of Planning and Partnerships, <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/opp/pubhealthact.html>, including a copy of the Act, an implementation guide and timeline, Advisory Group members, and sample resolutions for county commissioners. New materials will be posted upon development.

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