



## What is Public Health?

The mission of public health is “the fulfillment of society’s interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy.” This includes organized community efforts to prevent, identify, and counter threats to the public.

- Institute of Medicine, 1988

Providing public health services is no small undertaking. As a local board of health member you will be actively involved in efforts to prevent, identify, and counter threats in the area of Iowa that you serve.

You will find as you begin this work that public health is a broad field. It can be largely defined by looking at public health service delivery in five areas:

1. Prevention of epidemics and the spread of disease
2. Protection against environmental hazards
3. Prevention of injuries (both intentional and non-intentional)
4. Promotion of healthy behaviors
5. Preparing for, responding to, and recovering from public health emergencies

In order to deliver quality services, public health infrastructure also must be strong. To have the infrastructure necessary consider these areas:

1. Governance (the local board of health)
2. Administration
3. Communication and Information Technology
4. Workforce
5. Community Assessment and Planning
6. Evaluation

As a local board of health member you will learn more about all the areas of public health. As you carry out your duties, remember these guiding principles for local board of health members.

1. Support the mission of public health.
  - Promote understanding of the importance of public health.
  - Support local public health department activities impacting public health.
2. Communicate with residents in the area you serve (city, county or district).
  - Discuss health issues and concerns with business and community leaders.
  - Share plans for public health with those in the community and obtain their input.
3. Develop public health policy based on input from the community.
  - Determine policy based on current and reliable data.
  - Support policy for population-based public health and for individual health.
4. Assure compliance with legal responsibilities.
  - Understand the statutory basis (what the law says) on which board responsibility is established.
  - Conduct board meetings in accordance with the Iowa Open Meetings law (more about this later).
5. Understand and support quality and accountable practices.
  - Develop an understanding of public health's budget process.
  - Assure that program standards and requirements are met.