A strong public health system is vital to the good health of all Iowans. Currently, each county in Iowa provides public health services, however the services may be very different from county to county. In 2004 a group of local and state public health practitioners determined that standards should be written to define what every Iowan should expect from public health. Over 150 Iowans participated in that process.

The Iowa Public Health Modernization Act builds on those standards. It establishes a voluntary accreditation system for Iowa’s local and state public health departments that will enhance organizational capacity and assure a basic level of public health service delivery in each of Iowa’s counties.

Modernize to BUILD THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Community meetings held with local public health partners and the Iowa Department of Public Health brought forth a common set of concerns for Iowa’s public health system. The standards developed address these concerns.

- Public Health system is fragmented and lacking formal integration, the standards define lead agencies to deliver public health services.
- Funding streams are inconsistent, the standards delineate required public health services that need to be supported and maintained.
- Workforce fatigue and aging workforce, the standards delineate priorities and the need for a competent workforce to replace those who will retire.
- Inconsistent service delivery statewide, the standards outline a basic set of public health services available to every Iowan.
- Duplication of services, the standards require a community assessment to assist in the identification of duplicative services.
- Inadequate training for public health workforce, the standards require educational requirements for the public health workforce and expectations for continuing education.

Modernize to MEET A GROWING DEMAND for Public Health Services daily

A 2006 mumps outbreak in Iowa resulted in 1963 confirmed and 6,000 suspected cases. In the previous 10 years no one year had more than five confirmed cases of mumps. Local and state epidemiological capacity was limited. At the local level assistance was needed in the areas of investigation, data collection, statistical analysis and communication. At the state level a small workforce was not able to address local needs and maintain operations needed at the state health department in order to coordinate the response. This resulted in IDPH requesting assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Stronger epidemiological capacity would have enhanced the ability of public health to intervene more quickly. Epidemiological capacity is dependent not only on epidemiologists, but also on nurses, environmental health practitioners, data systems and public health laboratories.

Modernize because EMERGENCIES HAPPEN, and they affect the every day workings of public health.

The importance of a public health response to emergencies has been pointed out repeatedly in the last year.

- In the winters of 2007 and 2008 ice storms and bitterly cold weather affected Iowans, guidance was needed on how to safely shelter in place in the event of power outages. Food safety and the potential for carbon monoxide poisoning were potential threats.
- The tornadoses in the spring of 2008 caused much destruction; guidance on safe and sanitary clean up of hazardous and non-hazardous materials was needed.
- The extent of the recent flooding in Iowa highlighted several needs including;
  - The importance of doing a community assessment to define the needs of the community following a natural disaster.
  - A need for increased environmental health capacity to address the basic needs of those affected, like having safe water to drink.
Why is the Act important to Iowans?

- The Public Health Modernization Act will ensure that a minimal level of public health services are available in every corner of the state, and that public health agencies have the technology and tools they need to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

- The health of Iowans improves when local public health professionals have the tools and training they need to meet emerging health challenges. This includes working to prevent disease by promoting healthy behaviors.

- Whether it’s recovering from a natural disaster or detecting and responding to a disease outbreak or an environmental hazard, public health provides the first line of defense when it comes to protecting the health of Iowans.

- A national accreditation system for public health is now under development. Iowa’s ability to obtain federal funds may be impacted in the future based on Iowa’s accreditation status.

- Iowa is one of 21 states currently engaged in some form of public health performance improvement effort. Some of these states include Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, and Ohio.

What does the Act do?

- The Act helps increase system capacity and promotes equitable public health service delivery by creating a Governmental Public Health Advisory Council, to set policies and procedures on the implementation and administration of standards to be applied to public health practice at both the state and local level.

- The Act also establishes a voluntary accreditation process for local public health agencies and the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). An independent entity will oversee the accreditation process.

- The Act also creates a Governmental Public Health Evaluation Committee to collect and report baseline information on the public health system and service delivery needs and effectiveness.

Where do I go for more information?

Contact the Iowa Department of Public Health:

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