

Kansas Association of Local Health Departments

2018 Policy Statement

Public Health in Kansas

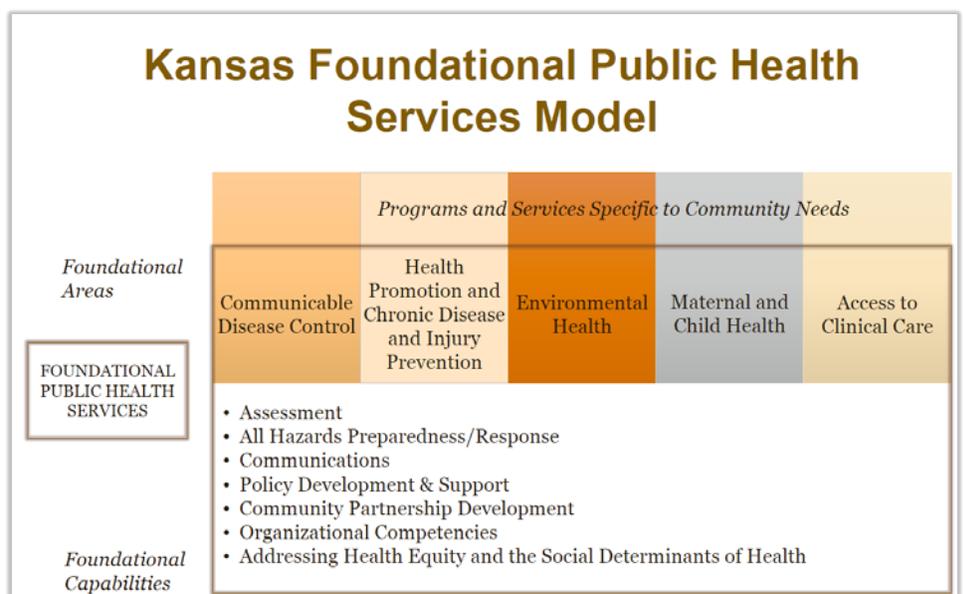
The State of Kansas has a decentralized public health system consisting of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment and 100 local health departments. Under Kansas law, local health departments report to the Board of Health, which in most cases is comprised of the Board of County Commissioners.

Public health's primary function is to protect and promote the population's health through prevention, environmental protection, and public regulations and policies.¹ Population-based prevention efforts improve the health of Kansans more efficiently than clinical care alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "health care accounts for only 10% of health outcomes; the remaining 90% are influenced by a complex mix of determinants of health including behaviors, socioeconomic, and physical environments."²

KALHD's vision is a system of local health departments committed to helping all Kansans achieve optimal health by providing Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS). The FPHS model defines a core package of public health services that should be accessible to all Kansans regardless of the jurisdiction within which they live.

The field of public health is evolving to focus on cross-sector collaboration and environmental, policy, and systems-level actions that directly affect the social determinants of health and health disparities. We believe change is needed in order for the Kansas public health system to respond to today's challenges:

- The current structure, government and funding mechanism for public health cannot currently assure a minimum set of programs and services to promote and protect the health of Kansans.
- America's Health Rankings analyzes behaviors, conditions, policies, and clinical care to describe the health of the nation. According to this data, Kansas has dropped in the national rankings for overall health outcomes from 12th in 1990, to 20th in 2000, 23rd in 2010, and now 27th in 2016.³
- In addition, wide health inequities exist across our state (from KDHE BRFSS data):
 - 65% of adult Kansans are overweight or obese, ranging from 55% in Douglas County to 75% in Cherokee.
 - 20% of all adult Kansans are current smokers, ranging from 12.6% in Johnson County to 45% in Geary.
 - 10% of adults in Kansas have diagnosed diabetes, ranging from 4.5% in Riley County to 17% in Wilson.



KALHD is actively working with public health and other systems partners to develop options for policy changes to modernize the public health system in order to ensure the health and safety of all Kansans.



The Kansas Association of Local Health Departments (KALHD) is a nonprofit association dedicated to strengthening local health departments for the purpose of improving and protecting the health of all Kansans. KALHD's membership consists of 93 of the 100 local health departments in Kansas.

For additional information, please contact: Michelle Ponce, Executive Director
michelle.ponce@kalhd.org • 785-271-8391

Policy Priorities

State Support for Local Public Health

The State of Kansas ranks near the bottom nationally for state support for local public health; a 2016 study conducted by Trust for America's Health, ranks Kansas 46 for state support to public health in FY 2014-2015,⁴ down from 38 in FY 2007-2008. State "Aid to Local" funding has remained level since 1995, while the cost for providing services has increased. We urge the governor and the Legislature to increase funding for public health services to strengthen the public health system and protect the health of Kansans.

Medicaid Expansion

We support expansion of the Kansas Medicaid program, which will complement counties' efforts in public health by bringing federal dollars to Kansas, provide vital revenues to our local providers, and reduce the number of uninsured Kansans.

Behavioral Health Services

Untreated mental illness, including substance use disorders, which former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy referred to as a "public health crisis," lead to chronic and long-term public health issues. We support restoration of state funding for both community-based and in-patient (both state and private psychiatric hospitals) crisis stabilization and treatment. We further support the strategies outlined in the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas's "Mental Health 2020 Initiative" to strengthen the Kansas mental health system.⁵

Elimination or Reduction of Sales Tax on Food

The State of Kansas has the highest rate of sales tax on food in the nation, which negatively impacts people's health and economic activity. We support elimination or reduction of the state sales tax on food.⁶

Immunizations

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccinations are one of the ten great public health achievements of the 20th century. Vaccines have reduced or eliminated many diseases that once killed or seriously harmed infants, children, and adults. Kansas statute provides exemptions to required vaccinations based upon the child's health or family's religious convictions. The current statutory exemptions are sufficient, and we oppose increasing allowable exemptions, which leads to decreased vaccination rates and poses a significant risk to the health and well-being of Kansans.

Clean Air

The Kansas Clean Air Act is an effective public health strategy aimed at reducing the negative consequences of second-hand smoke exposure. Efforts to diminish the effectiveness of the law through exemptions provide no public benefit, and if implemented, would negatively impact the health of Kansans.

Clean Water

Activities carried out by counties, including enforcement of local sanitation codes and ensuring proper wastewater and sewage disposal, are vital to ensuring a safe and clean water supply for Kansas families. State support for these services was eliminated when the Local Environmental Protection Program was defunded in 2012. In order to ensure protection of water quality across the state, we urge the Governor and Legislator to restore funding for these efforts.

Expand Access to Dental Care

As a member of the Kansas Dental Project, we support passage of the dental therapist legislation in order to increase access to quality, cost-effective dental care for Kansas families.

Community Fluoridation

We support preservation of community water fluoridation in Kansas. Community water fluoridation is proven to be a safe and effective way to reduce tooth decay.⁷

¹ CDC. (2012). *Public Health in the Age of Health Care Reform*. Atlanta, GA: Author

² Ibid.

³ America's Health Rankings. (2016). *2016 Annual Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/2016-annual-report/state/ALL>

⁴ Levi, J., Segal, L., St. Laurent, R., & Gougelet, R. (2016). *Investing in America's health: A state-by-state look at public health funding and key health facts*. Trust for America's Health. Retrieved from <http://healthyamericans.org/assets/files/TFAH-2016-InvestInAmericaRpt-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas. (2016). *Mental Health 2020 Press Release*. Retrieved from <http://www.acmhck.org/advocacy/public-policy>.

⁶ khealthkids. (2016). Change Kansas Grocery Tax. Retrieved from <https://www.kchealthykids.org/change-kansas-grocery-tax>.

⁷ CDC. *Fluoridation basics*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/basics/index.htm>.