



Healthy People Build Strong Communities

Kansas Association of Local Health Departments  
300 SW 8th Avenue, Suite 300  
Topeka, Kansas 66603-3912  
Phone: 785-271-8391  
[www.kalhd.org](http://www.kalhd.org)

## **Kansas Association of Local Health Departments 2020 Policy Statement**

### **Public Health in Kansas**

Public health's primary function is to protect and promote the population's health through prevention, environmental protection, and public regulations and policies. 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, socioeconomics, and physical environments."

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

### **Policy Priorities**

#### **State Support for Local Public Health**

The State of Kansas ranks near the bottom nationally for public health funding. Per America's Health Rankings in 2018, Kansas ranks 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation. When it comes to local health support, according to KDHE the State's "Aid to Local" funding has remained level since 1992, while the cost for providing services has increased with inflation. We support increased funding for public health services to strengthen the public health system and protect the health of Kansans. Funding for public health should be enhanced and substantially modified and should be identified to support core infrastructure and services as well as community-level work to address the social determinants of health.

#### **Social Determinants of Health**

Social Determinants of Health are the social and physical environments that promote good health for all. The determinants are broadly categorized as economic stability, education, health and health care, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context. Local public health departments, functioning as the chief health strategists for their communities, are working to coordinate solutions to gaps within the social determinants of health. We believe funding streams should be identified and created to help fund this work and legal barriers to making progress in these realms removed as necessary.

#### **Behavioral Health Services**

Untreated mental illness, including substance misuse, has been identified by the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare as a public health crisis. It leads 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.

#### **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.

### **Additional Policy Statements**

#### **Elimination 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, and we believe eliminating all sales taxes on food to be the best way to improve access to healthy foods regardless of income level.

## **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. We oppose increasing allowable exemptions, which leads to decreased vaccination rates and poses a significant risk to the health and well-being of Kansans. In addition, we feel the existing exemptions should be reviewed and those that pose significant risk to the public's health be repealed.

## **Methamphetamine Addiction**

According to Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, meth "affects our employers, it affects our schools, it affects our social fabric." Kansas' meth challenges require direct action to combat from a public health perspective. We support increased funding specifically targeting meth addiction, prevention campaigns, and creative approaches for local governments to explore to reduce abuse and improve health.

## **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.

## **Tobacco 21**

We support state-level legislation to raise the legal minimum age for sale of all tobacco and nicotine products to age 21. As of February 2019, 24 local governments in Kansas have passed Tobacco 21 ordinances designed to decrease rates of youth tobacco use and to combat tobacco-related disease and the corresponding economic burden of health care costs directly attributable to tobacco use.

## **Regulation of ENDS (Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems)**

In recent years ENDS devices (e.g., electronic cigarettes and vaping devices) have increased in use and sales, especially among youth. We support policies to regulate the sale, marketing and use of ENDS to protect the health of users, reduce youth initiation to nicotine and tobacco products, and promote enforcement of tobacco-free laws. We also support a ban on the sale of flavored nicotine vaping products.

## **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 (LEPP) was defunded in 2012. In order to ensure protection of water quality across the state, we urge for restoration of LEPP funding.

## **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.

## **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition program**

We support the priorities of the National WIC Association and support full funding of the WIC program in 2019; strengthening of the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program; the continued transition of the WIC program to an electronic benefits service delivery model (eWIC); and fully funding of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through the farm bill process as the SNAP program works in tandem with WIC and other programs to support low-income families to meet their nutrition needs and to combat hunger.

## **Resilient Communities**

According to the CDC, childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. We support funding and policies that support public health interventions to prevent or address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and support the use of trauma-informed care for public health practitioners in order to reduce or prevent the resultant wide-ranging health and social consequences.

## **Opioid Epidemic**

According to the CDC, in 2017 approximately 68% of the 70,200 overdose deaths in the U.S. involved an opioid. An average of 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. Local health departments play a critical role in responding to the opioid epidemic, and we support appropriate funding of efforts to respond to the opioid epidemic and to implement evidence-based policies and programs for the prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder and its related health consequences.