

Kansas Association of Local Health Departments 2022 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/Federal Financial Support for Local Public Health

While KALHD secured the first increase in the State's "Aid to Local" funding (aka State Formula) since 1992 (with an additional \$1 million in 2021) this does not fully account for all inflation and population factors. KALHD seeks an additional \$1.6 million in this Aid to Local funding, and a permanent increase in the minimum payment allocation to local health departments. We also support increased funding, both state and federal, 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 to support core infrastructure and services as well as modernization efforts.

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 crisis stabilization and treatment.

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 of the 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. If elimination is not viable we support reducing the sales tax rate on food.

Immunizations

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. We also oppose efforts to shift immunization decision-making from public health professionals or other steps designed to artificially complicate the process to determine immunization mandates.

Methamphetamine Addiction

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. We oppose efforts to diminish the effectiveness of the law through exemptions that provide no public benefit and would negatively impact the health of Kansans.

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; 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

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.

School Inspections

Local health officers are required to have a sanitary inspection conducted of each school building and grounds every fall term, per K.S.A. 65-202. Historically, this requirement could be chartered out of via home rule but that ability was lost when HB 2016 was passed in the 2020 legislative special session. We support making this statutory requirement optional given this task in many counties is handled by another entity. Optional would permit the local health officer to handle the inspection if desired in those locations where it makes sense.