

Tri-County Health Department Board of Health Orientation Manual

Introduction

Welcome to the Tri-County Health Department Board of Health! As a Tri-County Health Department Board of Health (BOH) member, you have a great opportunity to make a significant contribution to public health in Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties, and you can be of great service to the community in your new role. This manual is intended to be a brief introduction to your new duties and responsibilities and the operations of the Board.

Included in this manual are basic outlines of Board functions, duties, and characteristics. In addition, you will undergo a multi-step orientation process that will include:

- 1) Meeting with the Board President.
- 2) Meeting with Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) Public Health Director.
- 3) Meeting with TCHD management staff for orientations to the Department and the field of public health.
- 4) Meeting with other Board Members from your county for orientation to county-specific issues and procedures.
- 5) A Board Member from your county will be assigned as your mentor.
- 6) Tour of TCHD offices in your county.
- 7) Visit TCHD programs of your choice.

Following formal orientation, you will be provided with a BOH Reference Manual containing more in-depth information you may require now or in the future. The BOH Orientation Manual and the BOH Reference Manual are works in progress and will be refined and expanded to suit the future needs of the Board.

Tri-County Health Department

Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) is the district health department for Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties. It serves over one million residents and is the largest local health department in Colorado. TCHD's mission is to protect, promote and improve the health, environment, and quality of life for the residents of the three counties. Please see the Department's website at <http://www.tchd.org/> for specific information on its operations.

The TCHD Board of Health is comprised of nine members who are appointed by the County Commissioners: three each from Adams County, Arapahoe County, and Douglas County. The relationship between county commissioners and their respective appointees varies by county; the other Board members from your county will familiarize you with the specifics of working with your County Commissioners.

Public Health Overview

It is the responsibility of state and local health departments to protect and promote health and to prevent disease and injury. Much of the work of local health departments focuses on improving the health of the general population (population-based) through broad-based interventions, as opposed to the health care system, which primarily focuses on the treatment of individuals. The population-based services provided by public health departments are a major contributor to the overall improvement of a community's health status.

Prevention, promotion, and protection strategies are an integral part of the larger health care system. The mission of public health is to: 1) promote healthy lifestyles and improve the quality of life through better health and fitness; and 2) to prevent disease, injury, disability, and premature death. This includes protecting people's health from environmental dangers and health promotion through risk reduction and public education.

All public health agencies are responsible for fulfilling the three core functions of public health, which are: assessment, policy development, and assurance. Within these three core functions, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has identified ten "Essential Public Health Services" that describe the work of public health. Essential Services one and two are assessment activities while Essential Services three through five are related to the policy development function. Essential Services six through nine are assurance functions and the tenth Essential Service may be related to all three core functions.

1. **Monitor** health status to identify community health problems.
2. **Diagnose and investigate** health problems and health hazards in the community.
3. **Inform, educate, and empower** people about health issues.
4. **Mobilize** community partnerships to identify and solve health problems.
5. **Develop policies and plans** that support individual and community health efforts.
6. **Enforce** laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety.
7. **Link** people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.
8. **Assure** a competent public health and personal health care workforce.
9. **Evaluate** effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
10. **Research** for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

You will learn more about public health in general, and specifically, Tri-County Health Department's work, during your orientation session with the TCHD executive staff.

What is a Board of Health?

Boards of health are part of state and local public health systems and are charged to address health promotion, disease prevention, and public protection. They provide the necessary guidance and oversight of a local public health agency to assure the community's health.

Boards of health are a powerful part of a local public health system. Boards set policies; hire and fire the public health director; review operational data; and challenge any organizational activity when necessary. Boards also have financial oversight of the local public health department.

In Colorado, the specific role of boards of health is defined by the acts adopted by the state legislature. In general, their role is to make policy decisions regarding the purpose, function, goals, and activities of the local public health department. They also select, employ, and evaluate the public health director, who reports directly to the board. An effective board defines its mission and establishes clear, measurable goals to assure the successful performance of the local public health agency and its staff.

Title 25 of the Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.) specifically enumerates the powers and duties of health departments and boards. C.R.S. 25-1-506 lists the powers and duties of health departments and C.R.S. 25-1-507 lists the powers and duties of Boards of Health. A copy of these Statutes is included in the Board of Health Reference Manual.

Five Functions of a Board of Health

Administration

The Board defines the organization's purpose and helps establish direction for the organization by:

- Regularly scheduling and allocating funds for strategic planning for board members
- Defining a mission and establishing clear, measurable objectives to assure the successful performance of the local public health agency and its staff
- Regularly evaluating the board of health's responsibilities and performance

Program Planning and Budgeting

The Board ensures a program plan to address and serve specific needs and populations:

- Establishing and prioritizing goals and objectives that are consistent with the organization's mission statement
- Adopting a realistic budget to support the program plan
- Assessing the program plan and budget annually to determine its ongoing feasibility and effectiveness

Evaluation of Organizational Effectiveness

The Board regularly evaluates the health department by:

- Setting short and long term strategic objectives
- Evaluating them with department staff on a regular basis

Retention and Evaluation of the Public Health Director

The Board hires the public health director by:

- Establishing compensation and conditions of employment
- Annually evaluating the public health director's performance

Financial Stewardship

The Board takes a leadership position in the development of the financial resources by:

- Setting conditions and standards for all funds solicited in the health department's name
- Exercising fiduciary care of the funds entrusted to the agency's use through its approval of budgets and audit procedures as well as the establishment of appropriate policies and procedures for financial spending
- Engaging in sound long range financial planning

Board of Health Responsibilities

The Board of Health:

- Makes the final decision on policies concerning personnel, finance, public relations and programs
- Determines general policies for enforcing public health laws, orders, rules and regulations
- Acts in an advisory capacity to the public health director on all matters pertaining to public health
- Sets fees for personal health services rendered by the Department
- Hires the public health director and evaluates his/her performance
- Approves the Department budget
- Approves Department programs

Public Health Director Responsibilities

The Public Health Director:

- Makes the day-to-day decisions required to do the work of the agency

- Determines the type and number of staff to be hired; approves all hiring and termination of employees
- Supervises and directs the work of assigned staff members; defines duties and offers support
- Acts in an advisory capacity to the Board on policy setting.
- Makes the final decisions on all matters pertaining to public health
- Implements work authorized by the Board of Health
- Keeps the Board informed about organizational activities, progress and problems
- Makes sound recommendations for Board action
- Develops a balanced budget and presents it to the Board for approval

Board Member Job Description

Board members are expected to:

- Attend all board meetings, planning meetings, and assigned committee meetings. Notify the health officer or board chair of any anticipated absence from meetings
- Be informed about the health department's mission, services, policies, and programs.
- Abide by the Bylaws and Code of Ethics of the Board.
- Fully participate in Board of Health member orientation activities.
- Come prepared to contribute to the discussion of issues and business to be addressed at scheduled meetings, having read the agenda and all background material relevant to the meeting.
- Be involved at meetings and ask questions. Discuss and participate in the decision-making process. When unclear on facts, ideas, or suggestions, request clarification.
- Share wisdom and insights to help the board make appropriate decisions and policies.
- Speak out on ideas you don't favor. Silence is often interpreted as consent.
- Know and understand the roles and responsibilities of the board and staff.
- Know and maintain the lines of communication between the board and staff.
- Understand the financial statements presented. Board members are responsible for the financial stability of the health department.
- Serve on at least one Board committee annually; attend all meetings and participate in accomplishing the committee's objectives.
- Maintain the confidentiality of board members, department, and staff.
- Participate in recruiting new board members.
- Listen respectfully to other points of view.
- Represent the health department to members of the public and private industry.
- Become educated about the health needs of the community.

Characteristics of an Effective Board Member

An effective Board member:

- Does not dominate the Board
- Accepts collective decision-making
- Solves problems
- Is open-minded
- Develops a sense of Board camaraderie
- Has community interest
- Builds relationships
- Focuses on long-range planning
- Works with the public health director
- Learns his or her board responsibilities
- Develops a unifying purpose
- Is willing to compromise
- Accepts personal sacrifices
- Constantly looks for ways to improve
- Acts with integrity
- Makes decisions based on facts

A Public Health Director Expects a Board Will:

- Consult with the public health director on issues that the Board is considering.
- Counsel and advise the public health director using professional expertise and familiarity with the community
- Delegate responsibility for all administrative functions
- Support the public health director and staff in the performance of their professional duties
- Share all relevant communications with the public health director
- Support the public health director in all decisions and actions consistent with policies of the Board and the standards of the health department
- Hold the public health director accountable for the operation of the health department, including employee supervision
- Recognize that agency staff is responsible to the public health director
- Evaluate and recognize the work of the public health director
- Refrain from micromanaging administrative details

A Board of Health Expects Its Public Health Director Will:

- Serve as Chief Executive Officer of the health department
- Develop and recommend policies for consideration
- Advise the Board on issues under discussion
- Make professional recommendations on all issues being considered by the Board
- Effectively implement Board policies
- Keep the Board informed fully and accurately on activities of the agency
- Develop the agency budget and keep the Board advised of budget problems
- Recruit and retain the most competent personnel and supervise accordingly
- Devote time to professional development for the staff and public health director

Mentoring

New Board members will be assigned a mentor from their county. The mentor is expected to familiarize the new Board member with Board matters as well as county-specific issues and procedures.

Code of Ethics

All Board of Health members are expected to follow the Board's Code of Ethics and to disclose any conflicts of interest. Please read the Code of Ethics, which was included in your new Board member welcome packet.

Conclusion

In addition to the information provided above, you will have many opportunities to ask questions during the various steps of the orientation process. Please take advantage of all opportunities to learn more about Tri-County Health Department and your role as a Board member. We hope that you will find your experience on the TCHD BOH to be challenging and rewarding.

(Revision date: July 24, 2006)