

Brief Summary of Public Health in the United States

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The mission of public health is to "fulfill society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy." (Institute of Medicine, Committee for the Study of the Future of Public Health, Division of Health Care Services. 1988. The Future of Public Health. National Academy Press, Washington, DC)

Public health carries out its mission through organized, interdisciplinary efforts that address the physical, mental and environmental health concerns of communities and populations at risk for disease and injury. Its mission is achieved through the application of health promotion and disease prevention technologies and interventions designed to improve and enhance quality of life. Health promotion and disease prevention technologies encompass a broad array of functions and expertise, including the three core public health functions:

1. assessment and monitoring of the health of communities and populations at risk to identify health problems and priorities.
2. formulating public policies, in

collaboration with community and government leaders, designed to solve identified local and national health problems and priorities.

3. assuring that all populations have access to appropriate and cost-effective care, including health promotion and disease prevention services, and evaluation of the effectiveness of that care.

The Ten Essential Public Health Services:

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.

How is Public Health Different from the Other Health Professions?

There are many distinctions between public health and the clinical health professions. While public health is comprised of many professional disciplines such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, optometry, nutrition, social work, environmental sciences, health education, health services administration, and the behavioral sciences, its activities focus on entire populations rather than on individual patients.

For example, doctors treat individual patients one-on-one for a specific disease or injury. Thus, patients need medical care only part of the time.....namely, when they are ill. Public health professionals on the other hand, monitor and diagnose the health concerns of entire communities and promote healthy practices and behaviors to assure

our populations stay healthy. Thus, communities need public health all of the time in order to stay healthy.

For example, this population-based approach to health:

- * assures our drinking and recreational waters are safe.
- * prevents pollution of our air and land through enforcement of regulatory controls and management of hazardous wastes.
- * eradicates life threatening diseases such as smallpox and polio.
- * controls and prevents infectious diseases and outbreaks such as measles, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and the Ebola virus.
- * reduces death and disability due to unintentional injuries through the formulation of policies designed to protect the safety of the public, such as seat belt and worker safety laws.
- * facilitates community empowerment to improve mental health, reduce substance abuse and social violence.
- * promotes healthy lifestyles to prevent chronic diseases such as cancer, hearth disease and obesity.
- * educates populations at risk to reduce sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy and infant mortality.
- * assures access to cost-effective care.
- * evaluates the effectiveness of clinical and community-based interventions.