

# #CACantWait

## UNTIL THE NEXT CRISIS

## What is Public Health?

After a year living through the COVID-19 pandemic, you likely know some essential public health functions: testing, contact tracing, disease investigation, and vaccination against disease. But local public health agencies do much more than respond to crises; they support our ability to work, go to school, and enjoy our lives by preventing us from getting sick in the first place. Addressing long-standing systemic health and social inequities, particularly among communities of color, is a core focus of local public health.

Some of the ways local public health departments keep Californians healthy include:

- Educating people about staying healthy (e.g. smoking prevention, sexually transmitted diseases)
- Epidemiology (monitoring diseases in the community)
- Adult and childhood immunizations and mobile clinics for the most vulnerable (e.g. for flu, hepatitis C, COVID-19)
- Preventing food-borne illness (e.g. restaurant inspections)
- Preparing for natural disasters
- Helping children get a healthy start by supporting pregnant moms and newborns
- Providing outreach, care, and connections to social supports for the most vulnerable (e.g. homeless)
- Building partnerships with diverse communities to eliminate health disparities



*While a doctor treats people who are sick, those of us working in public health try to prevent people from getting sick or injured in the first place. We also promote wellness by encouraging healthy behaviors.”*

– American Public Health Association

### What Are Local Health Departments?

Public health is local. 61 Local Health Departments in California use their close ties to their communities and science based-solutions to prevent and control the spread of disease, protect against environmental hazards, prevent injuries, promote and encourage healthy behaviors, respond to disaster and assist communities in recovery, and assure the quality and accessibility of health services and health equity.

Local public health departments use a skilled workforce that includes nurses, doctors, epidemiologists, dentists, medical social workers, physical and occupational therapists, dietitians, outreach workers, health educators, program managers, environmental health specialists, and laboratorians, among others.

## How Are Local Public Health Departments Funded?

Local public health departments are funded through a combination of federal, state and local categorical funding streams. There are more than 200 categorical funding streams for public health, but only about 5% of all public health funding is flexible. Over the last decade, local public health departments lost up to one quarter of their funding, leaving workforces hollowed out and critical infrastructure lost.

People who work in local public health departments include nurses, doctors, epidemiologists, dentists, medical social workers, physical and occupational therapists, dietitians, outreach workers, health educators, program managers, pre-hospital care coordinators, among others.



***Over the past decade local and state health departments have lost 20% of their workforce, and local health department budgets shrank by as much as 24%. Almost all funding sources for local health departments have been declining at the same time that public health threats are growing - such as natural disasters, Zika, Ebola and now COVID-19.***

**SOURCE:** Public Health Alliance of Southern California. "Investing in our Local Health Departments: How Our Funding Decisions Today Will Determine California's Future." June 2020

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***The health emergencies of the past year - from flooding to wildfires, vaping-associated lung injuries to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) - are a stark reminder of the critical importance of a standing-ready public health infrastructure and workforce. Such a public health system requires adequate and sustained funding.***

**SOURCE:** Trust for America's Health. *The Impact of Chronic Underfunding on America's Public Health System: Trends, Risks and Recommendations, 2020*

## Public Health is a Critical Investment

The Public Health Alliance of Southern California released a report in 2020 documenting the value of local public health departments.

- **Return on Investment:** For every \$1 spend on Public Health, \$5.60 is reduced in overall health spending
- **Promotes Healthy Communities:** Public Health is a key part of population health and addressing the Social Determinants of Health
- **Improves Health Outcomes:** For every 10% increase in local public health spending, infant mortality decreases 6.9%, cardiovascular mortality decreases 3.6%, and Diabetes mortality decreases 1.4%.
- **Essential to Disease Prevention and Response:** Local Public Health Departments are the backbone of the response to disease outbreak. They provide essential prevention, surveillance, and response services to their communities.

Source: Public Health Alliance of Southern California