

April 22, 2020

Commissioner Jan Malcolm
Minnesota Department of Health
Freeman Office Building
625 Robert St North
St Paul, MN 55155



Dear Commissioner Malcolm:

On behalf of the Local Public Health Association of Minnesota (LPHA) and our more than 235 members of public health leaders from city, county and tribal public health departments across the state, I am writing to address concerns of LPHA members related to the state and local partnership in the ongoing COVID-19 response.

With the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic impacting our state, local public health understands there will be some growing pains as we learn how to maximize resources to lessen both the morbidity and risk to our residents across Minnesota. One of the key local public health responsibilities is preventing and controlling infectious disease. Case identification, contact investigation and isolation/quarantine are the core to this response. Two important pieces to this work include collaborative sharing of information both from local agencies to MDH as well as from MDH to locals. Local public health lacks access to county-level data from the statewide centralized infectious disease surveillance system. Without this, it is difficult to feel confident in meeting the responsibility of preventing and controlling infectious diseases. There is concern with how we can move forward with the 21st Century Public Health efforts in such an environment. Local public health can and is ready to play a critical role in preventing the spread and reducing the impact of COVID-19. Key to this is allowing robust data sharing with local agencies to allow them to understand who is infected in communities to both identify patterns in cases and prevent further spread of illness.

In addition, case finding and contact tracing will be an important part of the ongoing strategy to lessen the burden of COVID-19. As availability of testing increases, utilizing local resources as part of these efforts will strengthen Minnesota's ability to get ahead of transmission and contain the virus. Local public health in Minnesota has a strong history of completing contact tracing investigations. Agencies throughout the state regularly complete these investigations for other infectious disease outbreaks and many have staff ready to begin this work. Further, local agencies can provide additional strength in these investigations because they have built longstanding relationships at the local level and are equipped to link cases and contacts to essential services more easily. In order to do this effectively, local agencies need the option to manage case/contact follow up. We urge MDH, and especially Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control, to better engage local public health agencies in all aspects of planning and response.

LPHA looks forward to continued work with MDH to protect the health of all Minnesotans as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our communities.

Sincerely,

Richard Scott, Chair
Local Public Health Association of Minnesota

