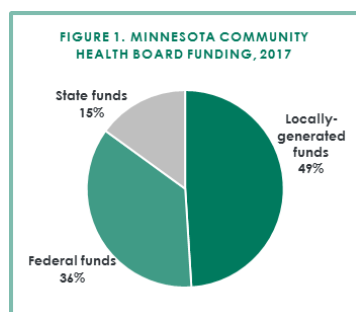




Investments in Local Public Health: Local Public Health Grant

By Amy Caron, LPHA Chair and Dodge-Steele Community Health Services Administrator

Our Local Public Health Agencies serve all citizens pre-birth until death. Public health agencies have a pulse on health issues within communities and strive first to prevent negative impacts. Local Public Health is the front line in identifying and stopping the spread of disease, investigating health hazards, promoting healthy behaviors, assuring access to health services for all people, and responding to health emergencies. The citizens of Minnesota not only rely on healthy places to live, work and play—but expect it.

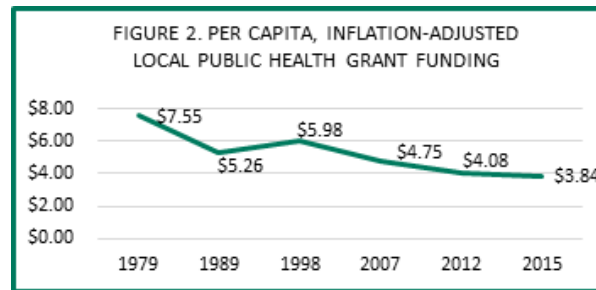


The Local Public Health Grant is one of the main sources of State investment in Minnesota's public health system. These dollars are intended to support state-mandated local governmental public health services and provide local policy makers with the ability to direct those dollars to areas where needed. The Local Public Health Grant accounts for a small fraction of Local Public Health expenses in Minnesota at just 6 percent.

Meanwhile, local tax levies are the single largest source of Local Public Health funding for Minnesota Community Health Boards, accounting for nearly 36 percent of all expenses. As illustrated in Figure 1, nearly half of Local Public Health funding is locally-generated. Federal funds contribute the next largest share, while state funds make up just 15 percent.

Compared to the nation as a whole, Minnesota's local public health departments rely more heavily on local funding.

As shown in the Figure 2, the per capita funding to the Local Public Health Grant statewide has been cut nearly in half since 1979, shifting the cost of critical public health services to local government, or worse, leaving significant gaps in communities across Minnesota.



As such, over the past 15 years, Local Public Health has seen a slow crumbling of public health infrastructure. This crumbling leads to dire consequences amongst the most vulnerable populations. Infectious disease and mental illness rates are going up. Trends of drug and alcohol abuse are rising. For the past two years in United States, average life expectancy has gone down (78.7 years) rather than up. Public Health is serving a larger number of people who are falling through the cracks.

During the 2019 legislative session, bills were introduced in the House and Senate that would increase Local Public Health Grant funding by \$16 million per year above the current base funding of \$21.6 million. This request is critical and would be a starting point to restore public health services to the citizens of Minnesota. As of mid-April, additional Local Public Health Grant funding is not included in the Senate's budget and is included in the House Health and Human Services budget at \$1 million per year. While any additional funding is welcome, it is imperative that we continue to lobby for critical Local Public Health funding via the Local Public Health Grant. ■

AMC Staff Celebrate Milestones

Two longtime AMC staff members recently marked milestones with the association. Deputy Director Laurie Klupacs started with AMC in April, 1989, and Communications Coordinator Becky Pizinger started in March, 1999. We asked them a few questions about how things have changed at AMC over the years and what has led to their longevity with the association.

Laurie Klupacs, Deputy Director – 30 Years

What was your first role at AMC?

I was hired as the assistant to the executive director, Jim Mulder during his first few weeks on the job in 1989. A few short months after that, we moved in to the new AMC building, which we are currently still in. I was immediately thrown into the unfamiliar territory of setting up the new office building with cubicle furniture, copier, fax machine, phone system, computers and computer networking for the first time as well as researching and creating a member database program. I also developed AMC's first website using a NACo sponsored tool called SpaceWorks.



What are the biggest changes you've seen during your time at AMC?

The way we communicate and do our work has radically changed. We used to have staff working from the very early hours of the day into late in the evening as we were not mobile with cell phones, email and laptops. Our work was very manual and time consuming. Our policy analysts referenced MN Statute from shelves and shelves of MN Statute books that were mailed each year to keeping all of our committee and membership lists separately on floppy discs that never seemed to be accurate as one change could affect many lists.

The other significant change is the focus of our work. AMC used to be primarily on focused on our legislative work and now we are equally, if not more focused on member services, education, training and research. This has been an important evolution because while legislation dictates much of what counties do every day, it's the people working in counties who have to figure out how to best deliver services for citizens. By placing more focus on educating county officials and staff, we provide tools they can use every day to do their work to the best of their abilities.

Why has AMC been a good fit for you?

Being part of a statewide organization with 100% membership, committed and active members that support the organization, our staff and working together across political and geographical lines for the betterment of the state of Minnesota is really rewarding. The organization is not bogged down with bureaucracy and we quickly adapt and change to meet the needs of our members. The constant change in the focus of our work, the way we deliver it, the tools we use and the actual membership is what keeps my job interesting and challenging.

What's the best part of working at AMC?

The best part of working at AMC are the people – both our talented staff and our incredible members. I feel very fortunate to have spent 30 years of my life working for this amazing organization that has offered me the opportunity to develop relationships across the state, while I continue to grow, learn, change and do work that I love every day. ■

Becky Pizinger, Communications Coordinator – 20 Years

What was your first role at AMC?

I was hired as the Communications Coordinator, which is still my title, but the actual work has changed immensely over the years as communications, in general, has transitioned from the printed word to electronic. When I first started in 1999, email and web sites were in their infancy--we barely used either to communicate with members. Within two years, that completely changed and I had to learn how to translate what and how we communicated to use the new tools at our disposal. As the nature of communicating evolved, so did AMC. AMC was always very willing to change with the times in order to communicate better using the new tools of communication. There were growing pains in that only about half of the members even had email, so for quite some time we had to produce both printed and electronic versions of everything! I know that AMC helped counties through the process of transitioning to this new digital world and utilizing the new tools for communicating--we learned and changed together.



What are the biggest changes you've seen during your time at AMC?

Really, it's night-and-day compared to how we communicate now. My career at AMC exactly coincided with the societal switch to primarily electronic communications. When I first started, for example, the *Legislative Update* was a biweekly printed newsletter that was mailed to all members. Completely different from what it is now! We'd have a deadline for materials from policy analysts on Mondays, then I'd lay-out and edit a 10 page newsletter, have it to the printer on Tuesday so that it could be printed on Wednesday and in the mail on Thursday so that members would receive it by Saturday. That's just one example. Everything was far more labor intensive and far less timely.

Electronic communications are so more effective because they're timely and easy for people to access. It's made AMC a far more effective as a membership organization because we're able to connect with members so much more easily. I think that because counties themselves are better able to communicate with each other more easily, too, the overall understanding of each other's similarities and differences has exponentially increased as communications have evolved, which leads to a more unified group—which is the whole point of a membership organization.

Why has AMC been a good fit for you?

AMC is a non-partisan organization with the primary goal of helping counties serve their citizens in the best ways possible, and I see that at work every day, which is really gratifying. Being part of an organization with members who are committed to building consensus to achieve the best outcome for all, despite their differences, is pretty rare in government. Counties play such an important role in the lives of people every day, and I feel the importance of AMC's role in helping them do that for the good of all.

Beyond that, AMC itself is simply a great place to work with a group of highly competent people working toward a common goal. There are lots of varied, moving parts at work every day, but to be in a place where you are confident that each individual is doing their part to achieve a common goal is very satisfying. AMC is a nimble organization that's truly committed to assisting counties, so I literally see our mission and purpose at work every day in everything we do.

What's the best part of working at AMC?

I get to do what I love and work with some really great people, so I'd say that's a pretty good way to spend 20 years! ■