

Local Public Health Association 2020



Legislative Action Priorities

By Richard Scott, Carver County Public Health Director & 2020 LPHA Chair

After legislative successes last session, Local Public Health Association (LPHA) members look forward to working with the legislature to promote and protect the health of Minnesota residents in 2020.

This session, we will be working on the following items:

- **Streamlining Minnesota's Food Safety System:** Oversight of Minnesota's retail food system is split between the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), which results in a confusing maze for food establishments when interacting with the system. Ensuring food is safe for consumers and preventing foodborne illness is a fundamental public health responsibility. LPHA supports consolidating retail food protection activities under MDH and supports maintaining the authority over food supply and distribution, manufacturing and farming with MDA. These changes will eliminate redundancy and streamline costs, improve the consistency of application of food regulations, and make it easier for local business to interact with the system.
- **Prevention Youth Tobacco and Nicotine Addiction:** The popularity of e-cigarettes is booming, with one in four MN 11th graders reporting that they vaped within the last 30 days in the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey. Nearly all adult smokers start smoking before the age of 21, and many kids turn to older friends and classmates as a source of tobacco products. With recent passing and enactment of Tobacco 21 at the federal level, state action is still necessary to protect Minnesota's young people. LPHA supports a state-level Tobacco 21 policy to align state law with federal law, removes penalties on young people who purchase, possess or use tobacco and improve reporting.

Further, LPHA supports regulations on flavored tobacco and nicotine products. Menthol, candy and fruit-flavored tobacco products are attractive to kids and can lead to a lifetime of tobacco addiction and disease. Flavors are used to mask the harshness of tobacco and other chemicals but are just as addictive and harmful as unflavored products. Although there has been limited federal action on flavored e-cigarettes, LPHA supports further regulation at the state level to ensure a prohibition on the sale of all flavored tobacco products, as part of a comprehensive approach to reverse the e-cigarette epidemic and reduce nicotine's harm in our state.

- **Investing in Local Public Health:** The Local Public Health Grant is the state's main investment in core services mandated to local public health by state statute. It provides flexible funding to local governments, so they can direct dollars to address needs in their communities. An over-reliance on local tax levies and unstable and unpredictable grant funding has compromised the local public health system's capacity to respond to current and emerging threats. Additionally, maintaining stable prevention funding for the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) to help Minnesotans live healthier, longer lives and continue to drive down state health care costs continues to be a priority for LPHA. Overall, LPHA supports funding to direct more dollars to prevention including emergency preparedness, statewide health improvement, mental health, public health nuisance, prevention of communicable disease, and emerging health threats.
- **Enhancing Services for Children with Asthma:** Approximately 90,000 Minnesota kids in every corner of the state struggle with asthma. In addition to health-related complications, the financial impacts of asthma on Minnesota are great. In 2014, asthma cost Minnesota an estimated \$669.3 million in medical expenditures and lost work days. Health education, combined with in-home inspections and allergen reducing products such as vacuum cleaners or air filters, reduced asthma symptom days by 21 per year, reduced missed school days by seven per year, and reduced acute health care visits to the ER, Urgent Care and unscheduled office visits. LPHA supports changes to Medical Assistance coverage to allow for reimbursement of home visits by a registered environmental health specialist or risk assessor to identify asthma triggers and delivery and instruction on use of durable low-cost medical equipment.

We are thankful for the expertise and commitment of our members and the ongoing support from AMC and other affiliate organizations. We look forward to working together to make 2020 a healthy and productive year! ■

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