

CHAPTER 11

CALL TO ACTION





Local governmental public health has a vital role in improving the health of every person in communities across North Carolina. For decades, health departments in our state have been working hard to make sure that our water is safe to drink, restaurants are clean, vaccines are readily available, children are born healthy-ready to learn and be successful in school, people have access to necessary health services, disease outbreaks are managed effectively, and the unique issues affecting the health of community members are identified and addressed. This is why public health is called “the quiet miracle”

Yet, local health departments struggle to provide these basic health protections and are seriously underfunded to achieve the full potential of improved health for the public.

We are at a time of great challenge and great opportunity for the future of local public health. The COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on public health’s strengths and challenges, revealing the extraordinary commitment of its dedicated employees and the deep need for investment in stronger systems to support them: modernized data infrastructure, greater capacity to communicate with the communities being served, funding for foundational capabilities and strong community partnerships for population health, and urgent efforts to sustain and grow the public health workforce.

The recommendations and strategies outlined in this report are key to moving North Carolina’s local public health infrastructure toward this future. They will require the efforts of those within and outside the public health sector to make necessary changes. The NCIOM Task Force on the Future of Local Public Health calls on the following entities to implement these recommendations:

- **Local Health Departments** should pursue opportunities to increase staff competencies in health equity, data analysis, communications, and partnerships; and continue to develop effective policies, programs, and services with increased accountability. However, these agencies can only accomplish this work if those at NCDHHS, County Commissioners, and General Assembly members provide adequate funding for this work;
- **North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health** should coordinate with local public health representatives to develop statewide structures attentive to data, communications, and workforce development that support local health departments and their partners;
- **North Carolina General Assembly** should provide adequate, sustainable, predictable, and flexible funding to enable local health departments to fulfill their fundamental roles and responsibilities to the communities they serve and provide incentives for innovative solutions to promote efficiency;
- **Local Government Officials**—County Commissioners and County Managers—should continue to support local public health financially and grow understanding of the needs of the local public health workforce;

- **Local Public Health Partners** should continue to work in partnership with local health departments to improve community health in North Carolina;
- **Public Health Nonprofits and Trade Organizations** should develop additional workforce training opportunities and participate in the development of statewide structures to address data, communication, and workforce development;
- **Public Health Philanthropies** should assist in the growth of public knowledge and awareness of the roles of local public health and continue to provide opportunities for innovation to meet community health needs;
- **Public Health Academic Programs** should share expertise and capacity with local health departments and collaborate to develop a workforce that is prepared and interested in working in local public health;
- **Health Systems and Payers** should continue to partner with local health departments to share capacity and develop a shared vision for population health; and
- **Business Leaders** should engage with public health to create healthier communities that allow the economy to grow, and to advocate for additional resources for local public health to be successful.