

# Recommendations for Improved Effectiveness and Efficiency of Local Public Health Protections in the Commonwealth

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## FACT SHEET

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JUNE 2019

*“No matter where you are—at home, at work, at school, or at play,  
local public health departments are responsible for  
ensuring your safety and wellbeing.”*

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### ABOUT THE SPECIAL COMMISSION

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The Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health was created by a legislative resolve signed by Governor Baker in August 2016 to “assess the effectiveness and efficiency of municipal and regional public health systems and to make recommendations regarding how to strengthen the delivery of public health services and preventive measures.” This fact sheet summarizes the commission's findings and recommendations.

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### WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

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#### Current State of the Massachusetts Local Public Health System

- Many Massachusetts cities and towns are unable to meet statutory requirements and even more lack the capacity to meet rigorous national public health standards.
- Massachusetts has more local public health jurisdictions than any other state (351)—one for each city and town—and cross-jurisdictional sharing of services is limited despite evidence that it improves effectiveness and efficiency.
- While other states have county or regional systems, most Massachusetts municipalities operate standalone boards of health that are unable to keep up with the growing list of duties.
- Because Massachusetts lacks a comprehensive system to collect local public health data, there is limited capacity to measure local public health system performance and to use local data to plan public health improvements.
- The Massachusetts local public health system does not adequately support the local public health workforce with standards and credentials that align with the capacity to meet current mandates and future standards.
- Funding for local public health is inconsistent and inequitable in its ability to meet the current mandates and the needs of a 21st century local public health system.

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## WHAT WE KNOW FROM THE NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHER STATES

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### Evidence to Support System Improvements

- National public health standards provide a framework for a minimum package of services and a roadmap to strengthen the system to meet those standards.
- Massachusetts and national evidence supports cross-jurisdictional sharing as a means to improve effectiveness and efficiency.
- The best practices for data collection and disease surveillance in Massachusetts and other states hold promise for improved data reporting and gathering capabilities.
- While there is an emerging effort to set national workforce standards, many states already have minimum qualifications for some members of the local public health workforce. In Massachusetts, minimum qualifications exist for other municipal officials such as building commissioners and library directors.
- The nationally recognized Foundational Public Health Services framework provides a means for costing out local public health services. Massachusetts and many other states face the challenge of limited investment of resources to ensure local capacity to provide 21st-century public health protections.

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## WHAT WE RECOMMEND TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

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### Summary of Commission Recommendations

- Elevate the standards for and improve the performance of local public health departments.
- Increase cross-jurisdictional sharing of public health services to strengthen the service delivery capabilities of local public health departments, take advantage of economies of scale, and coordinate planning.
- Improve state and local public health departments' planning and system accountability.
- Set education and training standards for local public health officials and staff and expand access to professional development.
- Commit appropriate resources for the local public health system changes proposed by the Commission.
- Continue to engage stakeholders as partners in the process; ensure that relevant state entities have appropriate authority; and explore administrative actions that state agencies can take that support the recommendations.

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## ABOUT THE COMMISSION'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The report of the Commission shows how Massachusetts can achieve a 21st century local public health system. It provides six interlocking recommendations and a detailed roadmap to achieve them.

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For more information about the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health including updates on the final report and recommendations, please visit the Commission web page at: [www.mass.gov/dph/olrh](http://www.mass.gov/dph/olrh)

For questions and comments, please send an e-mail to: [LocalRegionalPublicHealth@massmail.state.ma.us](mailto:LocalRegionalPublicHealth@massmail.state.ma.us)

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