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Fiscal Year 2024



Office of  
Local and  
Regional  
Health

Office of Local  
and Regional  
Health

# Annual Report

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# Message from the Director

Dear Partners,

At the Office of Local and Regional Health, our mission is to strengthen local public health systems and improve the health and well-being of all communities across Massachusetts. Over the past year, we have made remarkable strides in advancing public health by partnering closely with municipalities, enhancing our service delivery, and addressing the critical needs of under-resourced populations. This report showcases the success stories and the impact of our initiatives, reflecting on our collective efforts to meet the state's Performance Standards and drive meaningful change.

We are excited to reflect on the various achievements of this fiscal year, including the rollout of our office's Five-Year Strategic Plan. This plan outlines our approach to equitable public health access and advancement and highlights our office's values and dedication to addressing health disparities across Massachusetts. Shaped by the Blueprint for Public Health Excellence's six interlocking recommendations, the strategic plan plays a pivotal role in furthering our efforts to support local public health. We remain steadfast to partnership, equity, commitment, and sustainability as we look toward the future.

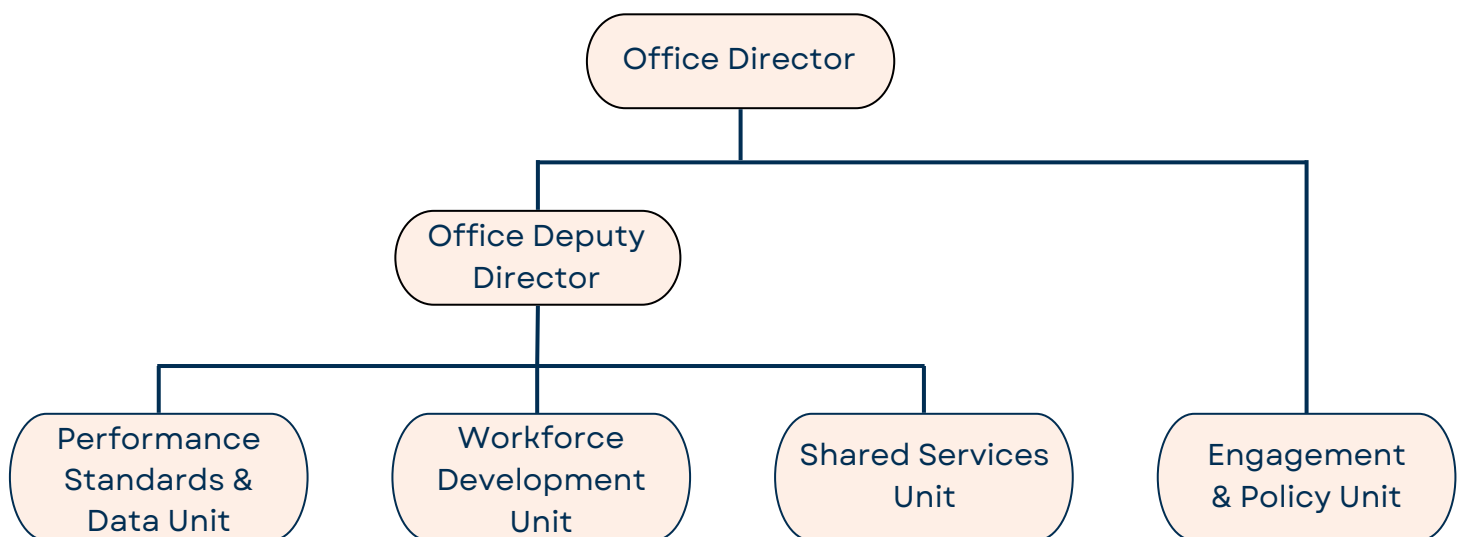
**Samuel S. Wong, PhD**

Director, Office of Local and Regional Health  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

# About the Office of Local and Regional Health

The Office of Local and Regional Health (OLRH) is dedicated to improving the quality of health and well-being across Massachusetts by providing statewide leadership and support to local public health (LPH). As part of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), OLRH collaborates with LPH, Tribes, and other partners to strengthen the state's public health infrastructure. OLRH is committed to delivering tools, resources, and guidance to protect and promote community health, grounding our efforts in racial and health equity principles to reduce disparities, and promote fair health outcomes.

OLRH continues to lead the implementation of the [Blueprint for Public Health Excellence's](#) six interlocking recommendations, which serve as a road map for the continuous improvement of LPH systems across Massachusetts. [OLRH's four units](#) – Engagement and Policy, Performance Standards and Data Systems, Shared Services, and Workforce Development (Figure 1) – play a key role in implementing the Blueprint's specific recommendations.



*Figure 1. Office Organizational Structure*

In fiscal year (FY) 2024, OLRH developed a comprehensive [Five-Year Strategic Plan](#) to align with the Blueprint's recommendations. This directly reflected the office's commitment to frame its goals and initiatives through an equity-focused lens. We encourage our partners to visit the [OLRH website](#) and learn more about our strategic plan. OLRH will continue to focus on capacity building and racial equity to advance Massachusetts' LPH system.

# Fiscal Year 2024 Projects, Achievements, and Milestones

OLRH plays a pivotal role in strengthening public health systems across Massachusetts by supporting LPH, facilitating statewide initiatives, and promoting equitable access to resources. In FY24, OLRH made substantial progress on the Blueprint recommendations through collaborative initiatives across its four units. Aligned with the Strategic Plan Priority Areas and subsequent goals, cross-unit collaboration significantly contributed to the following noteworthy achievements.

✓ **Released the first-ever Massachusetts Performance Standards for Local Public Health.** OLRH conducted a capacity assessment across **305** participating municipalities to evaluate LPH's current ability to provide basic public health services, as defined by the Performance Standards. This resulted in the release of the [Capacity Assessment Summary Report](#). These standards, created in close collaboration with local public health partners, are an important step toward achieving equity in public health service delivery across Massachusetts.

*“When local public health meets these Performance Standards statewide, it will mean that people in all cities and towns in Massachusetts can expect the same high-quality public health services ... DPH is already using the new standards to target resources and solutions, providing local public health with data they want and need to recruit additional staff, deliver training, and strengthen services.”*

**Robbie Goldstein, MD, PhD**

*Commissioner*

*Massachusetts Department of Public Health*

✓ **Assisted the LPH workforce in the annual credentialing process and increased credentials by 5.5%**, with **278** active Registered Sanitarians and **70** active Certified Health Officers. By upskilling LPH staff, we strengthen the workforce and ensure communities across Massachusetts are prepared to address current challenges and to meet the Performance Standards.

- ✓ **Increased grant funding, allocating approximately \$24M to support Shared Services Arrangements (SSAs).** Of the total grant award, **59%** was allocated to fund public health positions, equating to approximately **174.5** Full-Time Equivalents in the Massachusetts public health workforce. This targeted investment enhances local public health capacity to meet the Performance Standards and drives meaningful community improvements across the state.

*“Thanks to the Public Health Excellence (PHE) funding, our data collection initiative has transformed how we address critical health challenges in our community. The program not only improved our ability to gather and analyze vital health data but also empowered us to secure additional funding and implement targeted interventions, demonstrating the profound impact of PHE support on public health outcomes.”*



**Central Massachusetts  
Regional Public Health Alliance**

*Soloe Dennis, Director; Cherry Tangri, Shared Services Coordinator*

- ✓ **Collaborated across OLRH and DPH to develop a model workplan for Public Health Excellence (PHE) grantees,** featuring **24** model objectives related to sustainability, the Performance Standards, and Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS). With these tools, LPH can effectively make progress toward meeting the Performance Standards and connect the data to meaningful results.
- ✓ **Developed racial equity guidance with 45 model activities and additional resources for LPH use. Identified 4 Communities of Practice groups:** Assessment and Surveillance; Blood Pressure Screenings for Vulnerable Populations; Expanding Vaccine Access; Maternal, Child, and Family Health. These groups aim to create shared learning spaces and resources, and to support the integration of racial equity into local initiatives, making LPH interventions more inclusive and effective.

✓ **Partnered with LPH to develop the Massachusetts-centric FPHS guidance to advance towards the national FPHS adoption process.** OLRH completed a nomination process that engaged **112** advisory team members, with **71%** representing LPH. These members provided tailored examples of FPHS implementation for local public health entities, ensuring the examples were relevant and impactful for the diverse communities in Massachusetts.

✓ **Expanded OLRH's three-tiered LPH Training Program by implementing a train-the-trainer model, ensuring Training Hub facilitators were knowledgeable in Tier 3 (applied practice) training. This allowed all **10** Training Hubs to effectively provide Tier 3 training to LPH, increasing opportunities for communities to participate in practice-based learning.**

✓ **Led initiatives to reinforce consistent and actionable messaging from OLRH to our LPH partners, resulting in the development and launch of **12+** tools<sup>1</sup> and **8+** key projects.<sup>2</sup>** These equity-driven tools support LPH in their community-centric work, optimizing the accessibility and utilization of the developed resources. By providing clear, unified messaging, we ensure LPH partners are equipped to meet their communities' needs in a cohesive, informed, and effective way.

<sup>1</sup> The tools consisted of OLRH webinars, newsletters, one-pagers, half sheets, and flyers, promoting various LPH resources and initiatives throughout Massachusetts.

<sup>2</sup> These key projects include the OLRH Strategic Plan, Local Public Health Survey, Racial Equity Statement, TRAIN Massachusetts, Careers in Local Public Health website, Training Hub Program, and Foundational Public Health Services.

*"The Public Health Excellence (PHE) Grant has been instrumental in expanding our capacity to address public health needs effectively, enabling us to enhance disease monitoring services across our communities."*

**Montachusett Public Health Network**

Stephen D. Curry, Chairman



*"The adoption of inspectional software through the Public Health Excellence (PHE) Grant Program has revolutionized our approach to health inspections, leading to more streamlined processes and better service delivery across our communities."*

**Western Hampden County Public Health District**

Caileen Simonds, Shared Services Coordinator



- ✓ **Provided subject matter expert support to 39 LPH entities, across 13 technical support subject areas**, encouraging LPH to tap into experience, expertise, and capacity that may not otherwise be available, which allows LPH to address their unique challenges and serve their communities effectively.
- ✓ **Supported the LPH workforce by successfully migrating over 50 self-paced Local Public Health Institute courses to TRAIN Massachusetts**, as well as **439** user course records from the previous platform. This transition led to **2,578** completed self-paced trainings in FY24 and allows LPH to continue enhancing their skills and professional growth, by improving access to more training and professional development content.

*“Public health education is crucial; it empowers individuals with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.”*

**Middlesex-Essex Public Health Collaborative**  
Annette Garcia, Shared Services Coordinator



The impact of these initiatives has been transformative for LPH systems. By streamlining efforts, OLRH has worked alongside LPH to respond to evolving community health needs. Tailored tools and expert support have empowered local entities to implement more effective, data-driven interventions, while fostering a sense of shared ownership and collaboration across communities.

OLRH’s focus on equity-driven solutions has ensured that public health strategies are both inclusive and responsive to diverse populations across the state, advancing health equity at the local level. These efforts have not only prepared LPH to meet the emerging health challenges of their communities, but also supported their adaptability and resiliency.



# Fiscal Year 2024 Racial and Health Equity Highlights

Our commitment to racial and health equity has been a cornerstone of every OLRH initiative. Our most significant achievement in FY24 was the release of our [Racial Equity Statement](#). OLRH also provided guidance and tools, encouraging LPH to engage with these equity-focused resources and adopt actionable steps toward advancing equity within their communities.

The following sentiments embody OLRH’s commitment to ensuring that all residents, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status, have access to essential public health services.

*“The Public Health Excellence (PHE) Grant Program has been instrumental in expanding our capacity and improving service delivery across our 19 municipalities. The funding has enabled us to hire additional staff, including a housing specialist and public health nurses, which has significantly enhanced our ability to address the diverse needs of our community and improve public health outcomes.”*



## **Berkshire Public Health Alliance**

Laura Kittross, Public Health Program Manager; Sandra Martin, Health Agent; Lydia Shulman, Shared Services Coordinator

*“Our Cross-Jurisdictional Shared Services Program under the Public Health Excellence (PHE) initiative has been instrumental in enhancing public health services across six communities. By fostering collaboration, leveraging data-driven decision-making, and maintaining a robust communication network, we’ve built a foundation that not only addresses current public health challenges but also ensures sustainability for the future.”*



## **Halifax Public Health Excellence Group**

Bob Buker, Shared Services Coordinator; Bob Valery, Program Manager

*“Through the Public Health Excellence (PHE) Grant Program, we’ve been able to launch and sustain vital services like the childhood immunization clinic, ensuring that families in Revere, Chelsea, and beyond have easy access to the vaccinations their children need.”*



## **North Suffolk Public Health Collaborative**

Vanessa Guardado-Menjivar, Regional Epidemiologist; Ursula Kiczowski, Shared Services Coordinator

# Looking Ahead: Fiscal Year 2025

## Key Initiatives and Projects

As we move into FY25, OLRH is committed to building upon FY24's successes by enhancing collaborative partnerships and embracing innovation. In FY25, OLRH's initiatives and projects will be centered around engagement, data management, and capacity building. The following initiatives and projects outline our strategic direction for FY25.

## Data Management

**Transition to a cloud-based grant management platform,** streamlining the overall grant management process, allowing for more efficient grant compliance, reporting, and data evaluation. This transparent, data-driven approach is intended to improve accountability and facilitate more accurate tracking of public health progress, enabling SSAs to better support local public health efforts.

**Begin the buildout of a statewide Local Public Health (LPH) Data Solution,** incorporating user-centered design based on regular input and feedback from LPH. Implement a change management plan, ensuring early and frequent engagement with LPH, including forming an LPH Data Solution Advisory Team.



# Engagement

**Implement a restructuring of the OLRH website**, ensuring inclusive and accessible messaging for local public health and our partners. This project will incorporate plain language writing and an improved user experience to make information clear and actionable for diverse audiences.

**Introduce Communities of Practice groups** to support LPH working on common initiatives. Our Communities of Practice groups will foster cross-departmental collaboration, link SSAs with subject matter experts, and provide targeted technical assistance to improve health outcomes.



**Advance the FPHS framework** with a focus on equity to ensure all people in Massachusetts have access to high-quality public health services. Collaborate with local public health to develop Massachusetts-specific FPHS examples and FPHS Shared Services Review tools, creating guidance and support tailored to meet LPH needs.

**Strengthen engagement with LPH through OLRH-specific tools and initiatives**, including monthly webinars, email bulletins, press releases, newsletters, and other communications, to leverage digital and in-person engagements and maximize reach.

# Capacity Building

**Incorporate community college-level opportunities** to advance into the LPH workforce directly, ensuring local public health is a valuable, essential, and rewarding career open to everyone. This also ensures a skilled labor pool remains dedicated to the unique needs of Massachusetts communities.

**Design and implement a Racial and Health Equity Fellows/Partners Program** for 15-20 fellows. This program will help integrate racial and health equity principles into the annual work plan goals for SSAs.



**Expand capacity for [Tier 2](#) of the Local Public Health Training Program.** This enables more public health professionals to access critical training opportunities and strengthens the statewide workforce and public health infrastructure.

**Standardize the recruitment, training, credentialing, and advancement** of the public health nurse workforce to ensure equitable and consistent delivery of clinical public health services across Massachusetts.

These goals will empower LPH to deliver more equitable, efficient, and impactful services. Ultimately, together we can strengthen the local public health systems across Massachusetts.

# Connect with OLRH

The Office of Local and Regional Health remains dedicated to strengthening sustainable infrastructure and advancing the development of our resilient local public health system. We extend our deepest gratitude to our partners for their unparalleled contributions throughout FY24.



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## Glossary

### Acronyms

DPH	Department of Public Health
FPHS	Foundational Public Health Services
FY	Fiscal Year
LPH	Local Public Health
OLRH	Office of Local and Regional Health
PHE	Public Health Excellence
SSA(S)	Shared Services Arrangement(s)

### Resources

[Blueprint for Public Health Excellence](#)  
[Capacity Assessment Summary Report](#)  
[Foundational Public Health Services for Local Public Health](#)  
[OLRH Five-Year Strategic Plan](#)  
[OLRH Racial Equity Statement](#)  
[Performance Standards for Local Public Health](#)  
[Public Health Excellence Shared Services Grant Program](#)