

# Blueprint for Public Health Excellence

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## LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

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FEBRUARY 2020

*In June 2019, the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health (SCLRPH) released its final report, **Blueprint for Public Health Excellence: Recommendations for Improved Effectiveness and Efficiency of Local Public Health Protections**. The report documents the Commission's findings and makes recommendations for strengthening local public health services across the Commonwealth.*

*This sheet addresses the SCLRPH charge to examine “the capacity of local and regional public health authorities in comparison to national public health standards.”*

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### SCLRPH FINDINGS

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- Many Massachusetts cities and towns are unable to meet statutory requirements and even more lack the capacity to meet rigorous national public health standards.
- National public health standards provide a framework for a minimum package of services and a roadmap to strengthen the system to meet them.

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### WHAT ARE LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS?

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Standards define what programs, capabilities, and services a local health department should offer. There are several national approaches available, but the one identified by the Commission as most suited to Massachusetts is Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS). FPHS, which was developed by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine in 2012 and based on previous work done through the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), defines seven critical capabilities and five basic program areas (see table).

Another framework, the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), which also came out of the early work done at the CDC, is considered to be even more rigorous than FPHS. PHAB administers a voluntary accreditation program for tribal, state, local, and territorial health departments.

FOUNDATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES, CAPABILITIES AND PROGRAM AREAS	
Capabilities	Program Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assessment / Surveillance</li> <li>▪ Community Partnership Development</li> <li>▪ Emergency Preparedness and Response</li> <li>▪ Organizational Administrative Competencies</li> <li>▪ Policy Development and Support</li> <li>▪ Accountability / Performance Management</li> <li>▪ Communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communicable Disease Control</li> <li>▪ Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention</li> <li>▪ Environmental Public Health</li> <li>▪ Maternal, Child, &amp; Family Health</li> <li>▪ Access to and Linkage with Clinical Care</li> </ul>

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## WHY ARE STANDARDS IMPORTANT?

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Adopting standards allows local health departments to set goals across a broad range of domains, measure current performance, and gauge progress. A higher level of functioning across the entire Massachusetts local public health system will improve outcomes for residents and reduce disparities between them.

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## SCLRPH RECOMMENDATIONS

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Elevate the standards for and improve the performance of local public health departments by:

- Finding ways to help cities and towns meet existing statutory and regulatory requirements, and
- Evaluating timeline and appropriate phases of implementation of the Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) as the minimum set of services that every Massachusetts resident can expect to receive.

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## WHAT IS THE COMMONWEALTH DOING TO HELP LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS?

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Massachusetts does not currently have local public health standards apart from those implicit in its decades-old statutes and regulations. For this reason, a two-step process is the most realistic for the Commonwealth in modernizing its local public health system. The first step is to bring local health departments into compliance with existing laws and regulations. The second is to help local health departments meet the criteria for FPHS in readiness for when these are eventually adopted at the state level.

The Commission recommended the formation of the Local and Regional Public Health Advisory Committee ([www.mass.gov/service-details/local-and-regional-public-health-advisory-committee](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/local-and-regional-public-health-advisory-committee)) to monitor progress on implementation of its recommendations which includes a recommendation related to local public health standards. The Advisory Committee was launched in January 2020.

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## WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING LOCALLY AND NATIONALLY?

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States such as Oregon, Washington, and Ohio have used FPHS as the cornerstone of their public health modernization efforts, using the standards to assess capacity, set priorities, and implement new programming.

In Massachusetts, a very small number of larger cities—Worcester, as part of a health district, in 2016; Boston in 2017; and Cambridge in 2018—have sought and been given national accreditation from PHAB.

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## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

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- Department of Public Health Office of Local and Regional Health Resources: [www.mass.gov/dph/olrh](http://www.mass.gov/dph/olrh)
- Manual of Laws and Regulations Relating to Boards of Health: [www.mahb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MAHB-updated-Manual-of-Laws-and-Regulations-6.17.16-1.pdf](http://www.mahb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MAHB-updated-Manual-of-Laws-and-Regulations-6.17.16-1.pdf)
- Foundational Public Health Services: <https://phnci.org/national-frameworks/fphs>
- Public Health Accreditation Board: <https://phaboard.org/>

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The Commission's report, **Blueprint for Public Health Excellence: Recommendations for Improved Effectiveness and Efficiency of Local Public Health Protections**, is available on the Office of Local and Regional Health web site: [www.mass.gov/dph/olrh](http://www.mass.gov/dph/olrh).

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