The system that makes up our nation’s public health infrastructure is a complex quilt of organizations including state and local governmental agencies, community based health and social services, and not for profit agencies, each with linkages to the health care system. These entities work together to accomplish one primary mission – to improve the health of all people. Importantly, public health differentiates itself from health care. Public health services are population based – that is, services that are focused on improving the health status of a population, as opposed to hospitals, primary, and acute care providers who treat individuals.

Public health is a part of everyday life, and governmental public health is at the core of promoting health and protecting us from injury and environmental threats, as well as preventing the spread of disease. State and local health departments are consistently and constantly working to improve health in communities, yet their actions and accomplishments often go unnoticed. When the public health system is working well, the public’s health is being protected and health in communities is improving.

To accomplish this mission, public health departments balance three core public health functions. These functions are essential to the maintenance of population-based services.

**The Three Core Public Health Functions and the Ten Essential Public Health Services**

1. **Assessment**
   - Monitor health status to identify health needs of the community.
     - Collect and make available factual information and data on the overall health status of the community and health disparities within the community.
     - Promote the establishment of highly functional information technology systems to advance timely collection and sharing of important health data and assure the ability to track and follow changes.
• States address this through vital records (birth and death data), the U.S. Census, surveys and assessments.
• This is also accomplished through tracking infectious diseases and other public health hazards, such as mosquitoes.

• Diagnose and investigate health hazards in the community.
  o Develop more detailed and essential information on the magnitude of a health problem, duration, trends, location, and people most at risk for being harmed, and how best to prevent or control the problem.
  ▪ This can be accomplished through follow up with contacts of people with infectious diseases, and the state public health laboratory.

2. Policy Development
• Inform, educate, and empower the public about health issues that affect them and their communities.
  o Inform the community about current or potential health hazards and the availability of services to address them.
  o Use media and social networks to provide timely updates on health information, especially to high-risk groups and individuals who can benefit the most from making wise health choices.
  ▪ Hosting community meetings and information sessions to engage people on special health topics.

• Mobilize community partnerships and actions to identify health problems.
  o Lead hospitals and other community based agencies in defining what is needed to improve health and engage them to take action.
  o Generate support among relevant groups that address community health needs and issues.
  ▪ An example is when health departments issue grants to communities after they have defined what they need to improve local health.
  ▪ Establish information sharing technologies that protect health information while still efficiently sharing data.

• Develop policies that support individual and community health.
  o Work with state governors and legislators to help inform developing state laws, rules and regulation.
  o Formulate goals and objectives to meet the priority health needs of the community and translate that into policy.
Examples include assisting local communities on how to develop safe walking paths to schools; or defining policy to build a new long term care skilled nursing facility.

3. Assurance

- Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety.
  - Remain vigilant in protecting the community through proper inspections and observations of threats to health.
    - Examples of state public health enforcing laws and keeping the population safe include regulation of food, water, lodging, and health and child care facilities.

- Link people to needed health services.
  - Acquire, allocate, and dispense resources, and enable public health workers to meet priority community health needs in the best way possible.
    - This includes grants and services for maternal and child health programs, WIC, and clinical services when needed.
    - Funding for Immunization clinics and dental clinics for children living in poverty.

- Assure a competent health workforce.
  - Develop strong relationships with post-secondary education, medical schools and schools of public health and adopt a culture of continuous quality improvement and life-long learning.
  - Develop efficient processes for licensure of professionals and certification of facilities with regular verification and inspection follow-up
    - Examples include education and training for personnel to meet the needs for public and personal health service.

- Research innovative solutions to current and emerging public health problems.
  - Conduct research studies and provide consultation to health system partners.
  - Establish a process of review to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of programs so that improvements can be made to policies, activities and outcomes.

- Evaluate the effectiveness and accessibility of population-based health services.
  - Examine risk factors that contribute to lack of access for individuals and communities having specific health problems or reduced health status.
Conduct community health impact and needs assessments to identify health system effectiveness.

To achieve the most effective public health system, public health departments may seek accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board. Accreditation certifies that state and local health departments have established and maintain quality and performance standards that are nationally recognized, practice focused, and evidence based. Achieving accreditation is one way to evaluate and succeed in the best health outcomes for all populations.