

Georgia | Kathleen E. Toomey, MD, MPH

Commissioner and State Health Officer

Georgia Department of Public Health

Kathleen E. Toomey, MD, MPH, was appointed commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health (GDPH) by Governor Brian Kemp in March 2019. As commissioner, Dr. Toomey oversees 159 county health departments in 18 health districts, and various public health programs: Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Maternal and Child Health, Epidemiology, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Emergency Medical Services, Vital Records and the Georgia Public Health Laboratory.



Prior to coming to GDPH, Dr. Toomey joined the Fulton County Department of Health and Wellness in April 2016 and led the transition of the Department to become the Fulton County Board of Health July 1, 2017.

An epidemiologist and board-certified family practitioner, Dr. Toomey's career in public health has been long and distinguished. She attained her undergraduate degree at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, and received her M.D. and M.P.H degrees from Harvard Medical School and the Harvard School of Public Health. As a Fulbright Scholar, she studied indigenous healing practices in Peru.

Upon completing her residency in family medicine at the University of Washington in 1982, Dr. Toomey began her medical career as the clinical director of the Alaska Native Hospital in Kotzebue, Alaska. In 1985, Dr. Toomey was selected as a Pew Health Policy Research Fellow at the Institute for Health Policy Studies at the University of California, San Francisco. While in San Francisco, she served on committees looking at the initial cases of emergent HIV.

Dr. Toomey joined the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1987, initially as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer in Atlanta and later as the Associate Director for External Relations in the Division of STD/HIV Prevention, where she was responsible for developing national and international policy related to HIV partner notification, and advocating for the integration of STD screening and treatment programs into comprehensive women's health care. In 1991, Dr. Toomey worked in Washington, D.C., as a legislative assistant on health issues, staffing U.S. Senator John Chafee (R-R.I.) and the Senate Republican Task Force on Health.

In 1993, Dr. Toomey became the State Epidemiologist and Director of the Epidemiology and Prevention Branch of the Division of Public Health in the Georgia Department of Human Resources where she managed three major health programs -- HIV/AIDS, STD and TB. In addition, she was responsible for supervising all state epidemiology programs including disease surveillance and outbreak investigations, environmental epidemiology, and the epidemiology units supporting the maternal and child health and chronic disease prevention and control programs.

From 1997 to 2005, Dr. Toomey was appointed the Georgia State Health Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health in the Georgia Department of Human Resources. In this capacity, she provided leadership for all major public health programs statewide, including the HIV/STD/TB programs and other

infectious diseases prevention, chronic disease prevention and health promotion, environmental health and injury prevention, public health data and vital records, epidemiology, the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Program, and emergency preparedness and response. As State Health Officer, Dr. Toomey was responsible for an agency budget of more than \$600 million, with 1,000 state and 5,000 related county employees statewide.

In 2007, Dr. Toomey returned to CDC as the Director of the Coordinating Center for Health Promotion that included the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the National Office of Public Health Genomics, and the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. She managed a budget of over \$1 billion and programs in areas as diverse as women's reproductive health, chronic disease prevention/health promotion, and the prevention of birth defects.

In September 2009, Dr. Toomey had the opportunity to work in the CDC Botswana office as the acting director of the CDC Botswana operations and chose to stay as the permanent director for nearly five years. At CDC Botswana, she oversaw numerous HIV and tuberculosis research and prevention activities across the country, and additionally served as a consultant to the Botswana Ministry of Health on such diverse health issues as tobacco-use prevention and traffic-related injuries.

Dr. Toomey was elected to the Council on Foreign Relations, a nonpartisan organization dedicated to better understanding the world and the foreign policy choices facing the United States and other governments. In her role on the Council, Dr. Toomey provides a voice for public health diplomacy within the context of international foreign policy. She has lectured nationally and internationally on an array of health issues.

Dr. Toomey has received many honors and awards for her outstanding work and dedication, including the CDC Award for Contributions to the Advancement of Women and the Public Health Service Plaque for Outstanding Leadership. She was named to the 2000 Academy of Women Achievers by the Atlanta YWCA and received the 2001 Shining Star Award from the Atlanta Women's Foundation. Dr. Toomey was recognized nationally as the recipient of the 2003 Public Health Award from the American Academy of Family Physicians. She was the first recipient of the Recognizing & Encouraging Aspirations in Community Health (REACH) Award from Emory University School of Medicine in 2004 and was honored by the Georgia Public Health Association, receiving the 2005 Sellers-McCroan Award for outstanding achievement in public health policy and in 2009 by being named an honorary lifetime member.