

# Public Health Improvement Plan

2012



**PUBLIC HEALTH**  
ALWAYS WORKING FOR A SAFER AND  
HEALTHIER WASHINGTON

# Public Health Improvement Partnership

The Partnership is directed by the legislature to guide and strengthen the governmental public health system in Washington State. To accomplish that, we are responsible to ensure that our actions support a public health system that is accountable, continuously measures and improves performance and health outcomes, and reduces environmental and other health risks.

## Partnership Framework

### Partners

- State Board of Health
- Department of Health
- WA State Association of Local Public Health Officials
- Local Health Agencies
- Local Boards of Health
- Tribal Nations
- American Indian Health Commission
- DHHS, Region X

### Workgroups

- Public Health Activities and Services
- Public Health Standards
- Public Health Indicators
- Agenda for Change

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DOH Pub 822-031

1/2013

# Public Health Improvement Plan

# 2012

Washington State's public health system is characterized by strong relationships and shared leadership. Each local agency serves the needs of its own community; however, through the Public Health Improvement Partnership (the Partnership) leaders are able to work together, set a vision for the future, and focus on public health priorities to improve and protect health across Washington.

Every two years the Washington State Department of Health, in consultation with other partners, is required by law (RCW 43.70.520 and 43.70.580) to develop a public health services improvement plan. The intent is to continually improve our population's health and safety and provide specific guidance and funding to improve the public health system.

Since its inception the Public Health Improvement Plan (the Plan) has been a national model for strengthening the public health system through practical steps and coordinated activities carried out by local and state public health agencies. These activities focus not on illness but on assessing the capacity of public health agencies and programs, evaluating their effectiveness, and preparing them to meet future challenges.

The Partnership's work is presented in this Public Health Improvement Plan which summarizes the progress made to address the 2010 Plan recommendations as well as actions needed for the future.

## Impact on the System

Since 2010, the following ongoing efforts, guided by the 2010 Plan recommendations, have had a positive impact on the public health system in Washington:

### Public Health Activities and Services Inventory

This annual inventory provided measurement of core public health activities and services delivered by the governmental public health system across the state. Results from the activities and services counts were used to help evaluate and report on the work conducted by the system and to develop performance measures.

### Adoption of National Public Health Standards

In 2011 Washington State adopted the national Public Health Accreditation Board's set of standards for voluntary accreditation. In addition, the Performance Management Centers for Excellence continued their work around quality improvement, standards, and accreditation across the public health system.

### Local Public Health Indicators

This biannual indicator data update provided a snapshot of health status, health behavior, and public health system performance at the local level. Local health agencies used these indicator data to identify or confirm health issues, develop action plans, evaluate progress, decide where to invest limited public health resources, and provide community outreach.

Links to more information on these efforts are listed under [Resources](#) at the end of this report.

# Public Health Improvement Plan

# 2012

## Call for Transformation

The 2010 Plan recommendations also called for system transformation. While we were working to sustain our past successes, we were also positioning ourselves to confront emerging challenges.

During this time of economic uncertainty and changing population health, the Public Health Improvement Partnership remains committed to guiding and strengthening the governmental public health system in Washington State. To accomplish this we will focus on:

- Preventing communicable disease and other health threats
- Fostering healthy communities and environments
- Efficiently partnering with the health care system
- Eliminating disparities
- Creating a model for a stable funding foundation

## Agenda for Change Action Plan

A Partnership workgroup created an [Agenda for Change Action Plan](#) to address the 2010 system-wide recommendations to continue building a culture of accountability and quality improvement and reshaping the public health system to address the demands of a changing environment.

The Action Plan contains the following elements to comprise a roadmap for future work:

- Commitment to health equity
- Define foundational public health services
- Focus on strategic priorities
- Modernize business practices
- Identify essential partners

The Public Health Improvement Partnership has adopted the [Agenda for Change Action Plan](#) to guide our collective efforts over the next two years to transform Washington's public health network.

## Next Steps: Implementation

In the spring of 2013 the Partnership will identify specific and detailed implementation actions to accomplish our strategic priorities and foundational public health services. In addition, we will continue to build on our strengths and expertise to measure and improve public health services in Washington State.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in this important work!

# Agenda for Change Action Plan

FOR WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC HEALTH NETWORK

SUMMARY

2012



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**A growing and changing population**, new and resurgent diseases, and a severe funding crisis all make for a challenging future for Washington's public health network. While public health agencies on the state and local levels have seen major cutbacks, our communities are faced with significant health problems that impact people today and will likely affect the health of our state for generations.

Obesity, diabetes, and tobacco use are just a few examples of the health issues that are taking a huge toll on the people of Washington. About 95 percent of health spending goes toward treatment and health care, yet we know that how and where we live have the biggest influence on our health. That's why the work of public health agencies is so important. Preventing unhealthy behaviors and replacing them with healthy habits can drive down chronic disease rates and improve quality of life. Making it easier in local communities to access medical care, get fresh fruits and vegetables, and live an active lifestyle can help people live longer and save on health care costs.

The combined efforts of local, state, and federal health agencies have made major strides, but there's much more to do. The partners in Washington's governmental public health network realize we can't do it all. To protect and improve the public's health into the future, we must build a plan that sustains our past successes, confronts our emerging challenges, and uses the resources we have as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Washington's Public Health Improvement Partnership is working to plan for, guide, and strengthen our future public health network. The partnership includes local and state public health leaders, local boards of health and tribal nations, the state Board of Health, the American Indian Health Commission, and the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Together, this comprehensive group has produced an [Agenda for Change Action Plan](#). The plan provides the guidance needed to ensure that we continue to protect and improve the health of people in Washington State in spite of the many challenges.

The following is a summary of the vision, strategies, and steps to move toward a valued and effective 21st century public health network that will help everyone in our state have a better chance for a long and healthy life.

Thank you for taking an interest in the [Agenda for Change](#) and the important work of making Washington a safer and healthier place to live, work, and play.

**Mary C. Selecky**  
Washington State Secretary of Health

**Regina Delahunt**  
Director of Whatcom County Health Department  
*Co-Chairs, Public Health Improvement Partnership*

# The Agenda for Change

AN ACTION PLAN



Washington state's public health network has long been recognized as a national leader. The state **Department of Health** collaborates with a network of local public health agencies and tribes to protect every resident. Today, Washington continues that tradition of leadership by providing this **Agenda for Change**. This is a strategic framework that responds to a rapidly changing environment, such as new preventable disease challenges, health care reform, and diminishing resources, and helps everyone in our state have a better chance for a long, healthy, and economically productive life. A successful public health network keeps Washingtonians safer and healthier, reduces health care costs, and improves the productivity of our workforce so we can continue to be competitive now and into the future.

## Planning for the Future

The landscape for health is changing across the nation. Thanks to successes in public health and federal, state, local, and tribal funding commitments, communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza are no longer the leading causes of death. People now become ill and die early from preventable chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease that result from tobacco use, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity. Public health approaches will help solve this new challenge if we align our resources and competencies to match.

Implementation of the **Affordable Care Act** brings new opportunities for expanding insurance coverage and access to care for some of our most vulnerable populations. It provides states the ability to define essential health benefits. Ultimately, it allows the health care system to reform its business practices - while ensuring better collaboration with partners - as a means to slowing the increase in health care costs, improving the experience of care and improving the health of populations.

We are also living in a time when resources are scarce and competitive. Public health agencies at the state and local levels have seen major cutbacks over the past several years, compromising our ability to protect and improve the health of our communities.

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# The Agenda for Change

## AN ACTION PLAN

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With the Agenda for Change, our state can be **at the forefront of responding** to this changing landscape by transforming our public health network through three approaches:



- 1 Foundational Public Health Services** Ensure every resident in Washington can access a foundational set of public health services, no matter where he or she lives. The **Agenda for Change** introduces a new concept: residents can access a foundational set of capabilities and programs supported by adequate and predictable funding. These foundational services are necessary but not sufficient. Just like the foundations of buildings support the larger structure, the public health foundational programs support other standalone federal or fee-supported programs, like WIC, emergency preparedness and response, food safety inspections, and diabetes prevention.
- 2 Strategic Priorities** Prioritize our work so the public health network is working together to confront emerging challenges. The **Agenda for Change** helps us focus on the most important elements of preventing communicable disease and other health threats, fostering healthy communities and environments, and partnering with the health care system.
- 3 Transform Business Processes** Reform how we do business. Just as the health care system is changing through health care reform to better meet current challenges, the public health network must also undergo reform. This includes taking steps to ensure our workforce has the necessary skills and competencies to address new challenges, adopting the best of both private and public sector management into our operations, and developing a long-term strategy for predictable and appropriate levels of financing.

## Committing to Health Equity and Eliminating Health Disparities

All Washingtonians should have the opportunity to live long, healthy lives regardless of geography; education; income level; race; ethnicity; sexual orientation; or physical, mental, or emotional abilities. While data shows improvements overall, there are groups of people suffering from health problems above and beyond the population as a whole, as well as getting care and services that are lower quality, if they are receiving them at all. It is difficult to comprehend and painful to acknowledge that not everyone has an equal opportunity for a long, healthy, enjoyable life. Achieving health equity is a public health priority as local public health agencies, tribes, and the state work to identify health disparities and implement strategies to eliminate them.



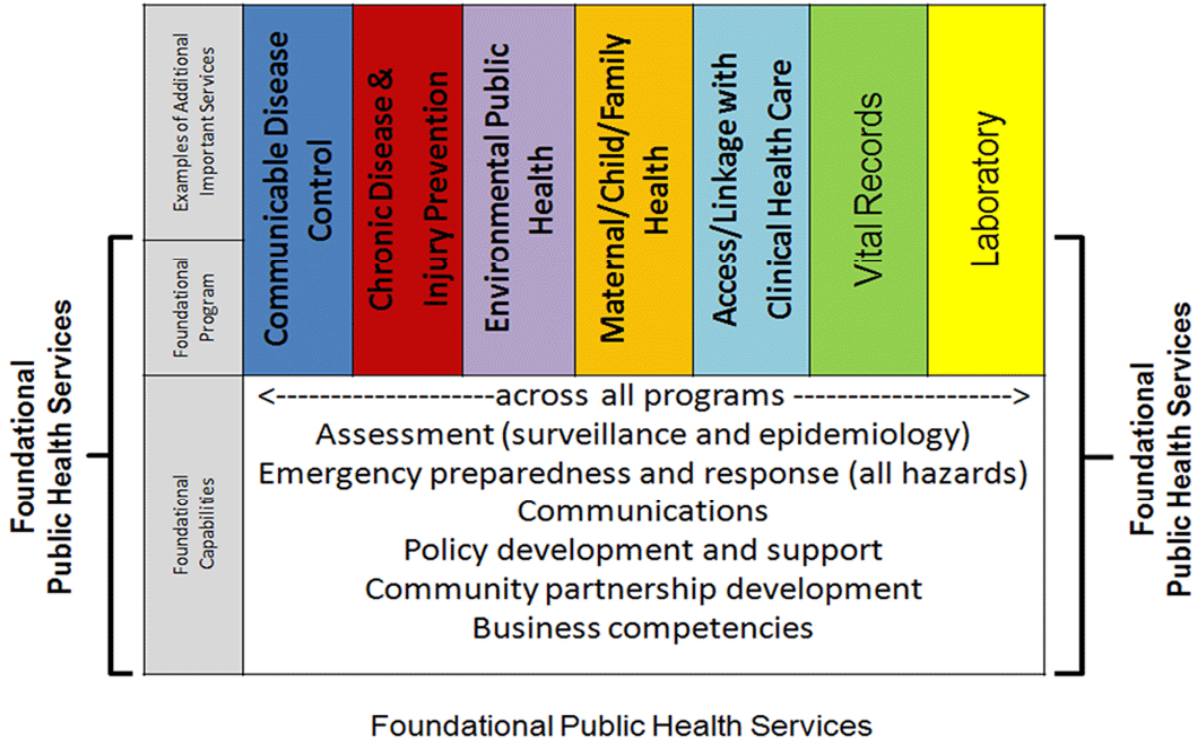
# Foundational Public Health Services

## Public Health Services for Every Community

Similar to other public safety (fire and law enforcement), public utilities (power, water) and infrastructure services (roads, sewer), a minimum level of public health capabilities and programs must be in place everywhere to protect and improve the overall health of the state. No matter where they live, residents of our state should be able to rely on the governmental public health network to deliver foundational services that protect all Washingtonians.

Health insurance plans describe their minimum benefits package - defining the services available to everyone who has that plan. Similarly, the **Foundational Public Health Services** define the public health services that no community should be without, regardless of how the services are provided. They include:

- **Foundational Capabilities** like community health assessments, communications, policy development, community partnerships, emergency preparedness, and modern business practices.
- **Foundational Programs** like communicable disease control; chronic disease and injury prevention; environmental public health; maternal, child and family health; linking with clinical health care; vital records; and laboratory services.



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The Foundational Public Health Services **define what must be present** everywhere for the public health system to function anywhere.

**GOAL** Develop sustainable public health financing statewide so that all residents have access to a foundational set of services that protect and improve their health.

**Objectives** Develop a scalable cost model for Foundational Public Health Services that can be adjusted for different population sizes and geographic locations.

**Rationale** A foundational level of capabilities and programs are needed everywhere to protect and improve the overall health of the state. No matter where they live, all residents of our state should be able to rely on the the governmental public health network to detect and remedy hazards to the health of the public, deliver a foundational set of services that protect their health, and meet specific standards.

**Strategies**

- > **Develop** a list of foundational capabilities and programs that should be available in every community. The list will not indicate who or how the services should be delivered.
- > **Using** a representative sample of counties, identify the cost of delivering the foundational services statewide.
- > **Develop** a funding model that accounts for these costs.

While the Foundational Public Health Services define the basic services to protect and improve health that people rely on government to provide, they do not define a vision for the future of public health in Washington. That vision is articulated in the strategic priorities to follow.

# Strategic Priorities



## Priorities for the Future

The following strategic priorities build on the strengths of the decentralized public health network in Washington by supporting local solutions to local issues. Having statewide priorities enhances our ability to work together with essential partners, resulting in the most impact for the investment and effort. This plan will move the public health network toward increased consistency in business practices and will fulfill public expectations for consistent services from government across the state. It will improve efficiency and make the best use of our available resources. The three priorities are:

- 1 Preventing communicable disease and other health threats
- 2 Fostering healthy communities and environments
- 3 Public health partnering with the health care system

# 1 Preventing Communicable Disease and Other Health Threats

Preventing people from getting sick from communicable disease is **foundational to the work** of public health agencies. We do this by assuring safe drinking water and food, providing immunizations, monitoring disease, and investigating outbreaks.



Preventing communicable disease is as important at home as it is in the developing world. The recent whooping cough epidemic in Washington shows that **we must be vigilant** in our efforts, embrace improvements in how we do our work, and modernize our systems to ensure effectiveness. We must be able to respond effectively to new disease threats like we did successfully with H1N1 flu, SARS, and mad cow disease. **Our efforts are vitally important** to the health of the whole population of Washington State.

➤ **GOAL** Implement the most effective and important elements of prevention, early detection, and swift responses to protect people from communicable disease and other health threats

➤ **Objective 1** Increase immunization rates for all age groups

**Strategies**

- **Improve** our understanding of immunization coverage in Washington State by enhancing the completeness and quality of data entered in the Washington immunization information system (adults and children)
- **Identify** and implement evidence-based practices to improve immunization coverage rates. Emphasize immunizations that provide the greatest impact to the health of people in Washington.

➤ **Objective 2** Standardize and prioritize communicable disease tracking, monitoring, and response

**Strategies**

- **Prioritize** the activities that are most critical to protect the public's health
- **Establish** evidence-based statewide recommendations for identifying and controlling communicable diseases

➤ **Objective 3** Develop, maintain, and integrate a data collection system for communicable disease tracking, monitoring, and responses

**Strategies**

- **Modernize** our data systems for disease tracking, monitoring, and response
- **Increase** capacity to receive electronic laboratory reporting of communicable diseases through a health information exchange
- **Implement** an updated, secure communication alerting system to send urgent messages from public health agencies to community partners



Governmental public health agencies work to protect and improve people's health **throughout the course of their life**, from healthy childhoods to living well as older adults. As we learn more about how childhood illness and trauma can affect someone for a lifetime, new evidence shows a strong connection between a woman's health *before* becoming pregnant and the health of her child.



While some factors that impact health are out of a person's control, behaviors are not. **People make choices every day** that impact their health, like what to eat, how active to be, and whether or not to use tobacco. These choices are largely influenced by where you live, work, play, and go to school.

Not everyone has an equal opportunity to make healthy choices. Success means making changes to our communities and environments so that everyone can choose to live a healthy life.

➔ **GOAL** Prevent illness and injury, and promote health equity through sustainable, population-based changes in communities

**Objective 1** Implement policy, environmental, and system changes that give all babies a planned, healthy start in life

#### Strategies

- **Connect** uninsured and underinsured women to preconception, prenatal, and postnatal care services
- **Collaborate** with health care providers to support women carrying babies to full-term
- **Improve** access to safe and healthy food for low-income women and families
- **Help** women quit using tobacco before and during pregnancy
- **Support** breastfeeding mothers in child care settings, hospitals, and worksites

**Objective 2** Implement policy, environmental, and system changes that prevent or reduce the impact of adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse and neglect on children and families

#### Strategies

- **Link** low-income families to programs that provide social and parenting support (examples include home visiting and nurse-family partnerships)
- **Screen** young children for developmental and socio-emotional issues and connect them with appropriate community services
- **Give** children safe and healthy meals (including snacks and beverages) in schools, child care settings, and after-school programs
- **Provide** opportunities for physical activity before, during, and after school and in child care settings
- **Prevent** youth from using tobacco products

**Objective 3** Implement policy, environmental, and system changes that help adults make healthy choices for themselves and their families

#### Strategies

- **Promote** affordable, healthy food and beverage options at worksites, colleges, hospitals, and other venues
- **Offer** free or low-cost physical activity opportunities in communities and worksites
- **Include** healthy design concepts when planning communities
- **Provide** smoke-free multi-unit housing
- **Link** people to quality tobacco cessation services (like the Tobacco Quitline)
- **Protect** employees, customers, patrons, and others from secondhand smoke



# Public Health Partnering with the Health Care System

A recent report from The Institute of Medicine argues that much can be gained by bringing primary care and public health together to improve individual, community, and population health. **Washington must act on new opportunities** presented through health care reform to bridge the divide between the two disciplines with a shared goal of improved health.



Health care today in **Washington faces many challenges**: the disease burden has shifted to chronic diseases, health care costs are rising and are unsustainable, and health care reform will increase the number of people with insurance, further challenging the health care delivery system.

Public health and health care providers can **respond to these challenges** by finding innovative ways to work together, jointly placing emphasis on preventing health problems before they become hard to treat and expensive. They can also team up with a broad range of community partners to set local priorities for improving health.

Public health agencies can contribute valuable information about health problems, they can help communities address the disparities in health among different groups of people, and they can help promote the use of prevention practices that have been shown to get results.

**GOAL** Improve access to quality, affordable, and integrated health care that incorporates routine clinical preventive services and is available in rural and urban communities alike by effectively and strategically partnering with the health care system.

**Objective 1** Provide more information about the community's health care system and the health of local communities

**Strategies**

- **Improve** knowledge about the health status of the community
- **Improve** information about the capacity of the health care delivery system within the community
- **Increase** information about how people use the health care system in the community

**Objective 2** Engage community leaders with a shared interest in improving health to identify and address community health problems. Mobilize resources and strategies to improve the health of the community, especially among populations affected by health disparity

**Strategies**

- **Convene** interested parties to develop community health needs assessments. This includes connecting hospitals, consumers, behavioral health, primary care, specialty care, and dental care services
- **Convene** interested parties to share information about the health of the community so that problems can be identified and potential solutions achieved

**Objective 3** Promote and adopt the use of evidence-based clinical preventive services and patient-centered health homes as a way to assure that needed care is well-coordinated

**Strategies**

- **Improve** provider use of evidence-based clinical preventive services like screening tests, counseling, immunizations, and medications used to prevent disease
- **Increase** the availability and use of patient-centered health homes so that patients receive the benefits of access to care, preventive services, and continuity of care



# Partners are Essential

Keeping our communities healthy is not the job of one agency alone; many organizations influence the health and wellness of the people they serve. Public health agencies throughout the state are continually working with partners. An important role of the public health network is to convene community groups to help define and address local health problems. This is especially vital with populations experiencing disparities.

We can also help our partners understand the relationship of health to their agency's mission. Examples of partners and possible actions they might take include:

## Child care and early learning centers

- *Example:* Adopt healthy food and beverage procurement guidelines

## Community employers and businesses

- *Example:* Provide physical activity opportunities for employees

## Community organizations

- *Example:* Participate in forums to learn about the health status of the community and identify policies to improve health

## Health care system (payers, providers, hospitals)

- *Example:* Work with local health agencies and the Washington State Department of Health to improve completeness of Washington's immunization system data

## Housing authorities, non-profit housing organizations, property management organizations, and landlords

- *Example:* Educate residents on the health risk of secondhand smoke and the benefits of quitting tobacco

## Schools, colleges, and universities

- *Example:* Work with local health agencies to promote immunization and improve coverage

## State and local government agencies

- *Example:* Include healthy community design elements in comprehensive plans

## Tribes and the American Indian Health Commission

- *Example:* Increase capacity to use policies, systems, and environmental changes when addressing health issues

# Next Steps

## IMPLEMENTING THE AGENDA FOR CHANGE



With Foundational Public Health Services and strategic priorities now defined in the [Agenda for Change](#), we're ready to implement. To make these strategies a reality, we will focus on workforce development, modify business practices for maximum impact, and identify long-term, sustainable financing for programs and services.

The future work of public health agencies must include retraining their workforce so they have the skills and competencies to meet today's challenges. Recruitment, selection, and retention strategies must be implemented to address skills gaps in health equity, policy change, social media, and communications.

The [Agenda for Change](#) also calls on Washington's public health network to **transform its business practices** and reprioritize its work by:

— **Working** with policymakers to set and prioritize specific health outcomes and establish ways to measure them

— **Streamlining** performance and accountability measures on public health actions that lead to the achievement of the prioritized health outcomes

— **Committing** fully to quality improvement by striving to meet state and national public health standards

— **Organizing** a more cost-effective public health network to achieve prioritized health outcome

— **Applying** the best of private and public sector management techniques to the operation of each of our programs

— **Critically** evaluating and reprioritizing our limited resources and better defining roles and responsibilities among the overlapping government authorities and jurisdictions

— **Modernizing** and sustaining capabilities to collect, analyze, and share information that policy makers, health agencies, and the public can use to make Washington a healthier place to live

Implementation of the [Affordable Care Act](#) brings new opportunities for expanding insurance coverage and access to care for some of our most vulnerable populations. It also provides states the ability to define essential health benefits, and ultimately, it allows the health care system to reform its business practices while ensuring better collaboration with partners. Our challenge and opportunity in public health is to do no less.

Health is important to all of us, yet we have limited government resources so we must use them wisely. Like police and fire services, people expect government to consistently and reliably provide public health services for all. The [Agenda for Change Action Plan](#) describes our vision for the future of public health in Washington State and how we will achieve it. We look forward to working with policy makers and partners as we implement the vision and strategies in this document.



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Photos provided by the Washington State Department of Health, the  
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For more information visit: [www.doh.wa.gov/philp](http://www.doh.wa.gov/philp)



# Public Health Improvement Plan

# 2012

## Other Resources

Public Health Improvement Partnership

[www.doh.wa.gov/hip](http://www.doh.wa.gov/hip)

PHIP Law

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.70.520>

<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.70.580>

Agenda for Change

[www.doh.wa.gov/PublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthSystemResourcesandServices/  
PublicHealthImprovementPartnershipPHIP/ResourceCatalog/AgendaforChange.aspx](http://www.doh.wa.gov/PublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthSystemResourcesandServices/PublicHealthImprovementPartnershipPHIP/ResourceCatalog/AgendaforChange.aspx)

Public Health Activities and Services

<https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hip/PHIP/>

Public Health Indicators

[www.doh.wa.gov/lphi](http://www.doh.wa.gov/lphi)

Public Health Standards

[www.doh.wa.gov/PublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthSystemResourcesandServices/  
PublicHealthImprovementPartnershipPHIP/ResourceCatalog/Standards.aspx](http://www.doh.wa.gov/PublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthSystemResourcesandServices/PublicHealthImprovementPartnershipPHIP/ResourceCatalog/Standards.aspx)

Performance Management Centers for Excellence

[www.doh.wa.gov/PublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthSystemResourcesandServices/  
PerformanceManagementCentersforExcellence.aspx](http://www.doh.wa.gov/PublicHealthandHealthcareProviders/PublicHealthSystemResourcesandServices/PerformanceManagementCentersforExcellence.aspx)

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