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King County Public Health Operational Master Plan

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A Policy Framework for the Health of the Public

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Introduction:

Public Health - Seattle & King County (PHSKC) provides a wide variety of regional services that protect and promote the health of all 1.8 million residents of King County, as well as the hundreds of thousands of workers and visitors who enter the County each day. In addition to providing many services directly, PHSKC works collaboratively with many other entities to address health needs of people living, working and visiting in King County.

Public health needs continue to expand because of changing conditions among King County's populations -- the rise of chronic conditions like diabetes, obesity and asthma; emerging diseases and concerns such as pandemic flu, West Nile virus, and terrorism; and, an increasing number of people who completely lack health insurance.

Policy Framework Background:

King County is establishing broad public health policy through development of a Public Health Operational Master Plan (PHOMP). The purpose of the plan is to define policies and create a sustainable operational and financing model for the provision of essential public health services in King County. The PHOMP is necessitated by funding challenges which have and will continue to face the Public Health fund for the foreseeable future. The PHOMP seeks to assure that these funding challenges can be met strategically and rationally. The funding challenges arise from a combination of limited or declining revenues, increasing costs of existing public health services, and increasing public health needs and mandates.

Purposes of the Framework:

The purposes of this policy framework are:

- To provide a set of principles to guide policy, strategies and actions that will improve the health of King County residents;
- To identify factors which determine what investments should be made in public health; and
- To describe the essential responsibilities of Public Health-Seattle & King County.

The Framework

I. King County's Mission for the Health of the Public:

King County Government, through its Executive, County Council, Board of Health and health department, identifies and promotes the conditions under which all people live within healthy communities and can achieve optimum health.

II. Definitions and Guiding Principles:

A. Definitions: Clear definitions of key terms used in the policy framework help achieve a common understanding among those using the framework. It is for that purpose that the following terms are defined.

1. Health: King County regards health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.¹

2. Factors Affecting Health: King County recognizes that many socioeconomic factors affect the health of communities. Health is affected by age, race, income, ethnicity, immigrant/refugee status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, health insurance status, neighborhood, level of education, behaviors, environment, housing, and accessibility of quality health care and public health services.

3. Public Health: King County regards public health as those activities that communities undertake to assure conditions in which people can be healthy. This includes organized efforts to prevent, identify, and counter threats to the health of the public.² Public health activities are carried out by the public health system, which includes the formal structure of County government, including the health department and the associated efforts of public health partners. The health department is the local entity that mobilizes and coordinates the broader public health system to accomplish the work of public health. King County expects the health department to provide leadership in addressing public health issues through the public health system, including a regular and periodic review of the public health system and the strategies being used. Public health

¹ World Health Organization definition

² Institute of Medicine and Public Health, Turnock, B. Aspen Press (1997)

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partners are those governmental entities, private organizations, communities, and individuals who are working with the health department, either formally or informally, to advance the health of the community.

4. Healthy Community: King County considers a healthy community as a place where people take the lead in assessing their own resources and needs, where social infrastructure and policies support health, and where essential public health services, including quality health care, are available. In a healthy community, the various sectors of the community actively communicate and collaborate with one another to achieve healthy conditions. The contributions of ethnically, socially and economically diverse community members are valued. In a healthy community the broad array of determinants of health is considered and addressed. Individuals make informed, positive choices in the context of environments, policies and systems which protect and support health.³

5. System-wide Strategic Planning: King County intends that the health department will continue to lead system-wide strategic planning processes on a regular, periodic basis. Such planning will help assure that County and community priorities are clear and are being addressed, and that resources of the whole public health system are being effectively and efficiently used to achieve intended health outcomes. Planning will take into account the successful programs and services currently provided by PHSKC and its partners as well as changing health conditions, newly emerging health issues, and dynamic social and economic conditions in the community. Sufficient flexibility will be assured to accommodate the inevitable changes in the future. Where changes are to be made, care will be taken to assure that critical capacities and alliances are maintained.

B. Guiding Principles

King County affirms that proposed public health policies and priorities be consistent with the following Guiding Principles within resource limitations.

1. Create Equity in Health: It is a pre-eminent goal of King County to eliminate preventable differences in health among different

³ Institute of Medicine, *Future of Public Health*, based on Goodman et al. 1996; CDC, 1997; and Norris and Pittman, 2000.

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population groups. Compelling evidence shows higher rates of health problems based on race, income, ethnicity, immigrant/refugee status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, health insurance status, neighborhood, and level of education when compared to the rest of the county. These health disparities have been persistent and have been increasing in King County.⁴ The problems identified by these data demand priority attention and a long-term commitment to creating and sustaining systems that support health for all.

2. Invest in Prevention and Health Promotion: King County values prevention of poor health conditions as the most cost-effective avenue to achieving optimum health. King County will invest in prevention and health promotion strategies, recognizing that preventing ill health is ethically and financially preferable to treating avoidable conditions.

3. Pursue Excellence and Innovation: The County intends that its health department be a recognized national leader in pursuing best practices and innovation in local public health practice. To fulfill its responsibilities for public health within its resource limitations, the County assures that its health department has the resources to support an organizational structure with strong leadership, a well trained and prepared workforce, sufficient service capacity and the modern information systems required.

4. Be Prepared: It is a fundamental responsibility of government to rapidly and effectively respond to health threats and emergencies. The County is committed to building and maintaining the capacity to respond before emergencies occur by developing response plans and responding vigorously when emergencies occur. The public health department should maintain a highly trained workforce that can be rapidly deployed to respond to both large and small health emergencies. Collaboration with all partners, including private sector, other government organizations and key individuals, is essential.

5. Measure Community Health: Another primary responsibility of government is the regular measurement of the health of people and communities. The County's ability in tracking health status and identifying emerging health problems is essential for the response of the health department as well as of the public health

⁴ The Health of King County, 2006 (<http://www.metrokc.gov/HEALTH/hokc/ppt/index.htm>)

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and health care systems as a whole. King County is committed to the regular assessment of health needs to help inform and support appropriate responses as conditions among the population change.

6. Form Partnerships: A strong public health system must include partnerships with a wide variety of organizations because health is highly dependent on a range of factors, including the environment, economics, transportation, air quality, education, built environment, and health care, among others. Partnerships needed to address these factors must include those not traditionally thought of as having direct health-related missions.

7. Engage all County Departments: Because many of the services provided by King County government can affect health, the County must consider health consequences from all its services. In addition to public health, services such as transportation, public works, criminal justice, animal control, land use and human services must be considered in the context of this framework. The County will also consider incorporating a health focus into other County policies, such as its Comprehensive Plan.

8. Assure Access to Health Care: The government's role in personal health care services is to help assure access to high quality health care for all populations. Assurance can be realized by directly providing the services and/or by forming partnerships with service providers. The County will actively develop partnerships with other providers of primary medical care, specialty care, mental health, dental and hospital services to create and sustain the greatest possible access to high quality culturally competent health care. The County will also advocate for access to health care for all.

9. Assure Sustainable Infrastructure: King County will assure a sustainable public health infrastructure and appropriately flexible resources to meet changing needs for essential public health services. The public health infrastructure must include a dynamic organizational structure, capacity and management practices of PHSKC. Best practices will guide the department's management practices to achieve operational efficiency, fiscal accountability, and program effectiveness.

III. Prioritizing Public Health Investments:

In considering policies for investing in public health, King County places high priority on the following factors in order to generate substantive commitment and action. Priority will be given to those policies, programs and practices that most fully address these factors:

A. Consistency with King County's Mission for the Health of the Public and Guiding Principles

B. Consideration of Need and Evidence:

1. There is a demonstrated, measurable need for the proposed action.
2. The proposed action is grounded in real-world evidence that it works and/or affords opportunity to innovate and create cutting-edge approaches.
3. There is reasonable likelihood that implementation of the proposed action would be successful.
4. Objective, measurable evaluation criteria can be established to evaluate progress toward meeting the related goal.

C. System Considerations:

1. The interests of the local public health system as a whole are considered and, where possible, addressed; opportunities for collaboration among system partners are identified.
2. A high level of integration and coordination of programs and partners can be achieved, preventing inefficient separation of related services.
3. The proposed action avoids unnecessary duplication of the work of other organizations.
4. The public health system has or will develop the necessary infrastructure to support the action.

D. Resource Considerations:

1. Adequate resources to support the proposed activities have been identified both in the current budget and to sustain the

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activity as needed into the future, or a plan exists for sustaining progress toward the goal should funding not be available.

2. The proposed action not only contributes to the improvement of the health of the population but the investment also avoids future costs.

3. Progress toward the goal can be monitored over time with practical tools of accountability for performance, for meeting public health standards, and for budget compliance.

IV. **Essential Responsibilities of Public Health-Seattle & King County:**

In King County, the health department (PHSKC) coordinates and implements county policy pertaining to public health. In keeping with King County's Mission for the Health of the Public, the health department's mission is to achieve and sustain healthy people and healthy communities throughout King County.

The essential responsibilities of PHSKC are defined by the national Operational Definition of a Functional Local Health Department.⁵ The definition is a shared understanding of what people in any community, regardless of size, can expect from a public health department. All local health departments exist for the common good and are responsible for demonstrating strong leadership in the promotion of physical, behavioral, environmental, social, and economic conditions that

- Improve health and well-being;
- Prevent illness, disease, injury, and premature death; and
- Create health equity.

Responsibilities include the following:

A. Measuring Health and Health Problems:

1. Understands the specific health issues confronting the community, and how physical, behavioral, environmental, social, and economic conditions affect them.
2. Investigates health problems and health threats.

B. Developing Health Policy:

⁵ National Association of County and City Health Departments, November, 2005

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1. Serves as an essential resource for local governing bodies and policymakers on up-to-date public health laws and policies.
2. Engages the community to address public health issues.
3. Coordinates the public health system's efforts in an intentional, non-competitive, and non-duplicative manner.
4. Ensures compliance with public health laws and ordinances, using enforcement authority when appropriate.

C. Assuring the Health of the Public:

1. Addresses health disparities.
2. Prevents, minimizes, and contains adverse health effects from communicable diseases, disease outbreaks from unsafe food and water, chronic diseases, environmental hazards, injuries, and risky health behaviors.
3. Leads planning and response activities for public health emergencies.
4. Collaborates with other local responders and with state and federal agencies to intervene in other emergencies with public health significance (e.g., natural disasters).
5. Implements health promotion programs.
6. Provides science-based, timely, and culturally competent health information and health alerts to the media and to the community.
7. Develops partnerships with public and private healthcare providers and institutions, community based organizations, and other government agencies (e.g., housing authority, criminal justice, education) engaged in services that affect health to collectively identify, alleviate, and act on the sources of public health problems.

D. Pursuing Quality:

1. Strategically plans its services and activities, evaluates performance and outcomes, and makes adjustments as needed to continually improve its effectiveness, enhance the community's health status, and meet the community's expectations.
2. Provides its expertise to others who treat or address issues of public health significance.

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3. Employs well-trained staff members who have the necessary resources to implement best practices and evidence-based programs and interventions.
4. Facilitates research efforts, when approached by researchers that benefit the community.
5. Uses and contributes to the evidence base of public health.

Appendix I Using the Framework

Using the Framework:

It is recommended that PHSKC review all current programs against the framework after its adoption, and then again on a periodic basis, sharing the results with the Executive, County Council, and Board of Health.

In addition, the Framework is the first component (Phase I) of the Public Health Operational Master Plan, and as such is the foundation for and will assist in guiding decision making during Phase II. The goal of Phase II is to provide specific recommendations regarding:

1. Options regarding service level and delivery of regional public health services, taking into account evidence-based best practices among the comparable MMHDs;
2. Options for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of regional public health services and functions such as performance measurement and evaluation, organizational structure, contracting, and budgetary and financial accountability; and
3. Options for long term funding for public health services.

Phase II work will add specificity to the broad guidance offered by this Policy Framework. To achieve the goal of Phase II, it will be incumbent to make decisions about complex issues by developing specific recommendations about:

- o Determining priorities for action among several competing options.
- o Striking the appropriate balance between innovative new approaches and maintenance of established programs.
- o Recommending allocation of limited resources among competing priorities.
- o Balancing appropriately the mix of services provided directly by PHS&KC and those provided by its partners in the public health system.
- o Assuring substantive relationships and collaboration within the public health system
- o Resolving any potential conflicts with and capitalizing on the synergy with other King County priorities.

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Appendix II Background

King County contracted with Milne & Associates, LLC (M&A) to assist with the development of the PHOMP. The first phase of the two phase project concludes with delivery of a policy framework. The contract specifies that M&A will provide

Recommendations to the Steering Committee on a broad policy framework to assist in prioritizing and guiding decision making on the provision of public health services in King County.

The framework will include:

- 1. The **mission and goals** for the County's provision of public health services;*
- 2. The **roles and responsibilities of the Department**, including a set of needed and evidence-based public health services and functions;*
- 3. **Policy guidelines addressing practices** such as performance measurement, evaluation, budget and financial accountability; and*
- 4. **Policy guidelines regarding funding.***

The recommendations shall reflect the flexibility needed to accommodate dynamic and changing community health conditions and emerging health issues.

The Public Health Operational Master plan process is being undertaken in two phases. The first phase is the development of a set of recommendations setting policy direction for King County government; and the second phase will result in funding and implementation strategies consistent with Phase I policy direction that will ensure that public health services are sustainable and able to respond to changing conditions in King County. The PHOMP is a collaborative process with the King County Council, the King County Board of Health, and the King County Executive.

The broad policy framework included in this document is the conclusion of the first phase of the Public Health Operational Master plan. The framework was informed by:

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- Four background papers⁶ whose purpose was to create a common understanding of the challenges and issues facing public health in King County as well as in five other comparable health departments across the country. The four background topics considered were:
 - Role: What is the purpose and role of a public health authority in a major metropolitan region and how does Public Health Seattle King County compare?
 - Health: How has the health environment changed in a major metropolitan region and how does Public Health Seattle King County compare?
 - Policy: What is the policy environment under which Public Health Seattle King County operates?
 - Funding: What is the forecasted funding under the current funding streams in a major metropolitan region and how does Public Health Seattle King County compare?
- Stakeholder interviews from November 2005 to March 2006.⁷
- Review of professional literature combined with the public health practice expertise of Milne & Associates
- Commentary from the Public Health Seattle King County Board of Health
- Review and commentary from the project's Steering Committee
- Review, commentary and collaborative efforts with King County Council staff, PHSKC staff and the project liaison.

⁶ All four papers are available on the Public Health Operational Master Plan site:
<http://www.metrokc.gov/exec/publichealthmasterplan>

⁷ The stakeholder report can be found on the Public Health Operational Master Plan site:
<http://www.metrokc.gov/exec/publichealthmasterplan/>