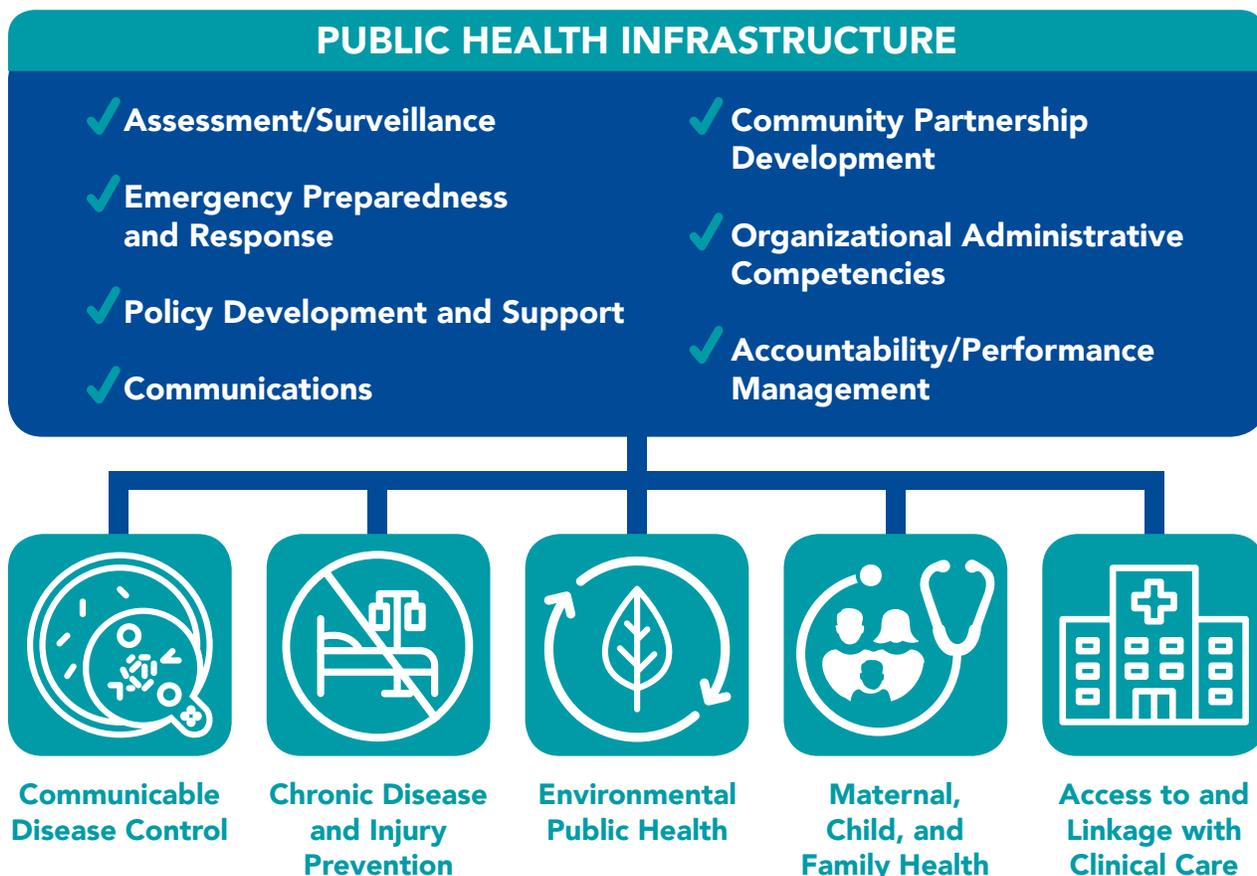


Every day and during times of emergencies, public health departments make our country a healthier and safer place to live and work. Public health aims to prevent health threats before they occur. Although responsible for much more, public health prevents the spread of disease and chronic conditions that impact the health status of a community and drive health care spending. Across the country, public health departments bring people together in emergencies and provide regular assistance to their communities and continue to evolve to meet their needs.

Built on a strong foundation of **public health infrastructure**, public health departments provide public health protections in a number of areas, including: preventing the spread of communicable disease, ensuring food, air, and water quality are safe, supporting child and maternal health, improving access to clinical care services, and preventing chronic disease and injury. In addition, public health departments provide local protections and services unique to their community's needs.

The infrastructure needed to provide these protections strives to provide fair opportunities for all to be healthy and includes seven capabilities: 1) Assessment/Surveillance, 2) Emergency Preparedness and Response, 3) Policy Development and Support, 4) Communications, 5) Community Partnership Development, 6) Organizational Administrative Competencies and 7) Accountability/Performance Management. Practically put, health departments have to be ready 24/7 to serve their communities. That requires access to a wide range of critical data sources, robust laboratory capacity, preparedness and policy planning capacity, and expert staff to leverage them in support of public health protections. Like all infrastructure, it tends to degrade over time without proactive maintenance and deliberate efforts to upgrade its capabilities as communities grow and evolve.





In the United States, government at all levels have a specific responsibility to strive to create the conditions in which people can be as healthy as possible.”

– *The Future of the Public’s Health in the 21st Century, Institute of Medicine, 2003*

Evidence suggests many public health departments don’t have the dedicated funding needed to build-out and sustain their public health infrastructure. Without them, public health departments simply can’t deliver seamless, high-quality protections the public expects. In fact, one recent landmark study estimated a nationwide gap in funding public health infrastructure at \$4.5 billion.¹

In ways large and small, public health prevents the spread of disease and brings people together to help communities stay healthy. To continue these activities and respond to new threats, the governmental public health system needs an ongoing commitment to fund the foundational public health infrastructure from federal, state and local governments.

Describing the public health infrastructure reflects the latest thinking in public health foundational capabilities for all health departments, regardless of where they are located. Because that infrastructure is shared across core protections, it’s helpful to distinguish foundational capabilities (shared) from core protections (funded distinctly via categorical funding, grants, or fees). That way, policymakers and the public understand that foundational infrastructure needs its own consistent and stable funding. For example, programs in areas like maternal and child health or disease prevention are funded distinctly through grants and/or fees. Public health infrastructure includes all hazards preparedness and response, assessment/surveillance, communications, community partnership development, organizational competencies, accountability/performance management and policy development. These are cross-cutting in support of all other programs and services the health department provides.

Tip to Remember

In public opinion polls, voters support public health departments and especially value protections related to stopping the spread of communicable disease, bringing others in government together in emergencies, protecting air and water quality, and supporting child and maternal health. High-performing public health departments use data-driven, evidence-based practice to be good stewards of public money and address community priorities. Delivering protections in their communities at this level requires a strong foundation of public health infrastructure.

For additional context and examples, the IOM covered this topic in its groundbreaking 2012 report

In public health practice, there are public health specific “foundational capabilities” that are required to support programs. For example, common surveillance capabilities are critical whether one is focused on communicable diseases, such as sexually transmitted infections, or on chronic diseases. Policy and other analytic capabilities are essential whether one is working on strengthening immunization uptake or taking steps to reduce childhood injuries. Such capabilities are needed across programs, and in general many of the same human and other resources can be shared among programs.

1. Developing a Financing System to Support Public Health Infrastructure, The Public Health Leadership Forum, November 2018