

The Ten Essential Public Health Services: New Mexico's County and Tribal Health Councils

What are the Ten Essential Public Health Services? The *Ten Essential Public Health Services* serve as a description and definition of public health, as well as providing a framework for any public health activity at the local, state, and national levels. This framework was developed in 1994 by a committee of representatives from major national organizations and federal agencies involved in public health. Since then, the Ten Essential Services have been almost universally adopted throughout the United States as a way to think about, and to evaluate, the practice of public health, forming the core of the National Public Health Performance Standards Program. The Ten Essential Public Health Services are aligned with the three core public health functions—*Assessment, Policy Development, and Assurance*—developed in 1988 by the Institute of Medicine.

Why do they matter? The Ten Essential Services provide a roadmap for creating healthy communities. Public health is about keeping people healthy, by preserving and protecting the health of entire populations and communities. The *purpose* of public health is to:

- Prevent epidemics and the spread of disease
- Protect against environmental hazards
- Prevent injuries
- Promote and encourage healthy behaviors and mental health
- Respond to disasters and assist communities in recovery
- Assure the quality and accessibility of health services

Public health is everyone's business—not just the government's. It takes everyone working together to create communities that are clean and safe, where people can make healthy choices and not die prematurely from chronic diseases, accidents, environmental toxins, drugs, and violence.

How do the health councils fit in? New Mexico is one of 13 states that do not have systems of local health departments that can do local health planning and coordination. Instead, New Mexico has a centralized Department of Health, with regional offices around the state. We depend on local County and Tribal Health Councils to take on the critical functions of identifying local public health needs, developing local priorities, coordinating programs and services, and serving as health information clearinghouses. The health councils convene groups of citizens to tackle difficult problems like substance abuse, teen pregnancy prevention, suicide prevention, and bringing health care access to underserved areas.



