

# Local Health Authority Initiative

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the Local Health Authority (LHA) Initiative is to give LHAs and the Texas Department of State Health Services an opportunity to:

- Clarify the LHA role;
- Identify resources and tools to help LHAs carry out their duties;
- Enhance communication between LHAs and the Texas Department of State Health Services;
- Develop an orientation and education program to support LHAs and their responsibilities; and
- Improve the coordination of public health services between local, regional and state-level public health entities.

## **Background**

A foundation of the state's public health policy, the Local Public Health Reorganization Act (Chapter 121 of the Texas Health and Safety Code) outlines the statutory provisions for public health functions by local governments. The statute permits but does not require local governments to perform public health functions. The state is expected to perform the functions if local governments opt out.

One of the public health officers identified in the Local Public Health Reorganization Act is the LHA. If a local government chooses to appoint a LHA, the duties of the office are outlined in this Act. No substantial training or guidance has been provided to existing or newly appointed LHAs to prepare them for the role they must play in protecting the public's health. In addition, because of the diversity of Texas (rural, urban, border communities), many local governments have established different roles and responsibilities for this office.

Many LHAs around the state have expressed a need for some type of orientation or training in order to perform their duties. In addition, DSHS Regional Medical Directors and LHAs have expressed a need to clearly establish the roles and responsibilities of the LHAs to allow for better coordination of public health services between overlapping jurisdictions as well as local and regional offices.

## **Activities**

- Review legislation and regulations relating to duties and functions of LHAs
- Conduct a statewide survey of LHAs to assess skills/needs of LHAs relating to core and emerging roles/responsibilities
- Conduct regional conference calls to clarify results of the statewide survey and identify key issues to address at the Statewide LHA Summit
- Hold a Statewide LHA Summit to discuss key issues and assess interest in enhancing or developing LHA policies

## **Next Steps**

- Formation of a LHA Work Group to research and draft wording to strengthen and clarify the LHA statute
- Charge the TDH Office of Public Health Practice to implement suggestions approved at the Statewide LHA Summit

## **For More Information**

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