



## STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

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January 25, 2025

**The Honorable J. B. Pritzker**  
**Governor of Illinois**  
**207 Statehouse**  
**Springfield, IL 62706**

Dear Governor Pritzker,

State statute (20 ILCS 5/5-565) requires that the State Board of Health (SBOH) report on or before February 1 of each year on the health of the residents of Illinois to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the public. I am pleased to submit this report on behalf of all the members of the SBOH.

The SBOH is currently composed of 16 Governor-appointed, Senate-approved members with diverse expertise who play a crucial role in addressing emerging public health challenges. In collaboration with Illinois' 102 counties and 97 local health departments, the Board emphasizes the importance of community investment and trust building to enhance health outcomes statewide.

The past years have been busy for all of us and especially for those of us engaged in safeguarding the health of the public, eliminating health disparities, and creating social and physical environments in which all citizens of Illinois can lead healthy and productive lives. In this report, we will touch on some of the highlights of the past few years.

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### **Oversight of Rules to Enact Legislation**

The SBOH has continued to work with Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) rules coordinators and the legal department to provide oversight, comments, and suggested revisions to a wide range of rulemakings that affect public health in Illinois. A sample of some of the rules that the SBOH has reviewed over the past few years are:

77 IAC 245 -- Home Health, Home Services, and Home Nursing Agency Code

77 IAC 295 -- Assisted Living and Shared Housing Establishment Code

77 IAC 545 -- Sexual Assault Survivors Emergency Treatment Code

77 IAC 590 -- Underserved Health Care Provider Workforce Code

77 IAC 690 -- Control of Notifiable Diseases and Conditions Code

77 IAC 661 -- Newborn and Infant Screening Treatment Code

77 IAC 692 -- AIDS Drug Assistance Program Code

77 IAC 693 -- Control of Notifiable Diseases and Conditions Code

77 IAC 845 -- Lead Poisoning Prevention Code

77-IAC 965 -- Health Care Professional Credentials Data Collection Code

Although many of these rule changes were relatively simple and straightforward, there was often robust discussion about the nuance of policy and terminology. During these discussions, the topical expertise of SBOH members was on full display. An example was the proposed update to the 77 IAC 693 -- Control of Notifiable Diseases and Conditions Code, which stimulated a long conversation about the roles of IDPH, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Illinois Department of Agriculture in data collection, inter-agency communication, and the potential for delays in disease reporting.

### **Presentations**

Quarterly Updates from Director Vohra and Assistant Director Phillips

Communication and Community Engagement -- Drs. David Chung and Susan Swider

Bird Flu and You – Drs. John Herrmann and Yvette Johnson-Walker

Infectious Disease -- Epidemiology -- Dr. Matt Leslie

Climate Change -- Mr. Graham Briggs

Upcoming vaccination season for Flu and COVID-19 -- Dr. Damon Arnold

Food allergies -- Dr. Damon Arnold

Inflation Recovery Act Update -- Dr. Damon Arnold

Environmental Health -- Dr. Damon Arnold

Nutrition -- Dr. Damon Arnold

Rescue Illinois Schools Initiative -- Ms. Erica Salem

IDPH Communications Moving Forward -- Mr. Andrew Buchanan

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### **Presentations** (cont.)

SHIP/SHA update – Ms. Jennifer Epstein

Legislative update – Ms. Allison Nickrent

Cottage Food Guide update -- Dr. Susan Swider

Data Modernization Report update -- Dr. Abel Kho

2024 One Health Policy Summit -- Dr. John Herrmann

### **Ad Hoc Task Forces and White Papers**

During 2023, Director Vohra asked that the SBOH advise IDPH on three major issues: Climate Change (CC), Communication of prevention and response strategies of health risks within the State, and Health Equity across all communities in Illinois.

The ad hoc Climate Change Committee presented its findings to the Board and formally through a letter to the Director late in 2023, with further discussion occurring throughout 2024. The three recommendations of the Committee and the follow-up actions were:

- 1) Appoint a Climate Change Coordinator, preferably a subject matter expert, to serve at the senior level as the spokesperson for and the director of Climate Change activities for the Department. Graham Briggs, State Epidemiologist, assumed that role during 2024 and presented IDPH-led Climate Change initiatives to the Board. We look forward to working with Mr. Briggs on climate related issues in the future.
- 2) IDPH should develop and continually update a CC webpage for the public as well as for healthcare professionals.
- 3) Conduct a two-day Climate Change Summit with state agencies, private businesses, NGOs, and individuals to coordinate CC activities at state and local levels. Such a Summit was completed in Champaign, IL in early December and was led by the Center for One Health Illinois (COHI), at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Although IDPH did not organize the Summit, Director Vohra was the keynote speaker and offered full Department support for the efforts of the Center.

These are some of the items that are moving forward regarding Climate Change. And understanding the complicated financial environment for the State of Illinois, we are proud to support IDPH's efforts to use other financial resources and augment partnerships to provide momentum around One Health and Climate Change initiatives.

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The ad hoc Communications Committee presented their findings and recommendations to Director Vohra during the September SBOH Board meeting. At the December SBOH Board meeting, Communications Director Andrew Buchanan presented his plans for 2025 and referenced the Committee report as support for interagency communication and outreach to local health departments and the community at large.

During 2024, IDPH made significant strides in advancing public health through strategic initiatives, robust collaborations, and innovative programs. In April, IDPH launched the "30 Days of Public Health" campaign, leveraging podcasts and a full suite of social media platforms to enhance statewide communication efforts. This initiative (along with the SBOH ad hoc report on communications) reflects IDPH's commitment to adopting modern communication tools to effectively engage with Illinoisans. IDPH is dedicated to expanding its communication strategies to amplify public health messages. By nurturing relationships with partners and stakeholders, the Department aims to build brighter futures for all Illinois residents.

The SBOH actively contributed to the development of Healthy Illinois 2028, the state's five-year plan for improving public health. This comprehensive State Health Improvement Plan addresses five critical areas: Chronic Disease, Emerging Diseases, Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder, Maternal and Infant Health, and Racism as a Public Health Crisis. These key priorities, framed within a "health in all policies" approach, serve as the blueprint for coordinated action across the state.

IDPH supported workforce development through the Public Health Workforce Initiative, securing infrastructure grants to address critical workforce challenges and ensure a robust public health system.

IDPH continues to prioritize partnerships with universities to advance public health goals. By fostering innovative collaborations, the Department seeks to strengthen the health and well-being of Illinois communities and individuals. As mentioned earlier, a recent example of this outreach was Director Vohra's keynote address at the One Health Policy Summit, sponsored by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Significant funding has been allocated to modernize systems, improve preparedness, and enhance communication efforts. This includes initiatives to improve health equity, access to information and services, and address statewide health disparities. Research and data-driven strategies remain at the forefront of these efforts. (FY24 IDPH Grant Programs -- \$307,321,330 Grant Funds Awarded within 111 Grant Programs.)

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In May, IDPH released the COVID-19 After Action Report, highlighting lessons learned and actionable strategies to prepare for future emergencies. IDPH's Chief Medical Officer and statewide medical teams continue to address outbreaks through strategic partnerships with communicable disease experts and disease control programs.

IDPH demonstrated its preparedness through the swift response to the March 2024 measles outbreak, the largest in three decades. These efforts were bolstered by the Public Health Emergency Health Information Center and enhanced regional coordination allowing the crisis to be addressed promptly and mitigate its impact.

Additionally, IDPH prioritized data modernization, improving the Illinois Disease Surveillance System, Long-Term Care systems, and developing a Master Patient Index to enable integrated, actionable public health data.

Recognizing firearm violence as a public health focus, Illinois has invested in safe firearm storage solutions. Through partnerships with local organizations, IDPH has distributed hundreds of thousands of gun locks at community events. Collaborations with the Illinois State Police have also advanced the use of Firearm Restraining Orders to prevent tragedies.

IDPH partnered with the Ad Council and Brady National Gun Violence Prevention Organization to launch Pause to Heal, a groundbreaking public health campaign in collaboration with the Illinois State Police.

Illinois continues to lead the way in preserving reproductive health and access. The Birth Equity Innovation Seed Grant, implemented by IDPH in 2024, provides funding to organizations with authentic ties to communities most impacted by inequities. This grant supports both the establishment of new programs and the maintenance of existing ones that promote equitable access to maternal care. IDPH remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring residents can make critical decisions about their health and well-being.

With the new federal executive branch administration, IDPH is reassessing goals, strengthening partnerships, and reaffirming its commitment to public health such as access to immunizations, fluoridation of public drinking water, and control of environmental toxicants. As we may be presented with reductions to federal funding of state public health departments as well as challenges to long-held policies and programs that promote public health, IDPH remains dedicated (together with its diverse network of collaborators) to enhancing the health and safety of Illinois residents throughout our state.

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In conclusion, the SBOH stands ready and will continue to support IDPH, your Office, and the people of the State of Illinois by a careful and thoughtful review of public health rules and policies designed to improve the health of all people in our great state.

Manythanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen D. Phelan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Karen" being particularly prominent.

**Karen D. Phelan**  
**Chairman**

cc: Deputy Governor Grace Hou  
Senate President Don Harmon  
Speaker of the House Emanuel Chris Welch  
IDPH Director Sameer Vohra  
IDPH Assistant Director Janice Phillips  
State Board of Health Members