

January 20, 2026

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) submit an annual report to you and the members of the General Assembly before February 1 of each year, detailing the activities of the SBOH, the overall health status of the residents of Illinois and the current condition of public health policy within the state. I am pleased to submit this report on behalf of all the members of the SBOH in fulfillment of that statutory obligation.

Pursuant to its charge, the SBOH serves in an advisory capacity on matters related to public health policy, public health emergencies, and the identification, mitigation, and control of health hazards. The SBOH also reviews Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) rules and programmatic proposals and provides recommendations intended to strengthen public health infrastructure and outcomes across Illinois.

By statute the SBOH is to consist of 20 members. Over the past six years, SBOH membership has fluctuated, at times consisting of as few as 13 members. We are currently pleased to report that the Board includes 18 Governor-appointed, Senate-approved members. The collective expertise of our current SBOH is broad and multidisciplinary, encompassing two veterinarians with formal epidemiology training, a physical therapist, multiple licensed physicians

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representing both academic medicine and private practice, a business community representative, a local public health administrator, an optometrist, a dentist, a registered nurse, a chiropractic physician, a health care industry representative and a citizen-at-large. I, along with Assistant Director Janice Phillips and Governmental Affairs Division Chief Allison Nickrent, remain committed to fully constituting the SBOH through the appointment of a physician (non-specified specialty) and an additional citizen-at-large. We stand ready to collaborate closely with your staff to identify and appoint individuals who bring both subject-matter expertise and a strong commitment to public service for the benefit of all Illinoisians. We also continue to welcome opportunities to broaden representation to include additional public health professionals and community partners reflective of the diversity of our state.

The SBOH has been invited by IDPH Director Sameer Vohra to convene in Springfield for its Board Meeting on Thursday, June 4, 2026, at 11:00 AM at the IDPH offices. It is our expectation that full SBOH participation will be achieved, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at that time, should your schedule permit. I will coordinate with our liaison and your Office to explore the feasibility of such a visit.

As noted in last year's report, the morbidity and mortality measures associated with SARS-Cov-2 virus variants have seemingly diminished over previous years, but new (Respiratory Syncytial Virus) and old (seasonal influenza) challenges, compounded by lower influenza vaccination rates, once again brought the calendar year to a close. Concurrently, the enduring demands of protecting population health, addressing health inequities, and fostering social and physical environments that support healthy and productive lives for all Illinois residents remain central to our mission. This report highlights several key areas of focus and accomplishment over the past year.

### **Oversight of Rules to Enact Legislation and the IDPH legislative priorities**

In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the SBOH continued its close collaboration with the IDPH Rules Coordinators and the Division of Legal Services to provide oversight, technical review, and policy guidance on a wide range of administrative rulemakings with public health implications. Our Legislative Government Liaison delivered quarterly updates regarding the status and progression of rules previously reviewed by the SBOH. During the reporting period, the SBOH conducted extensive reviews of the following statutes and associated administrative codes:

- Home Health, Home Services, and Home Nursing Agency
- Health Maintenance Organizations
- Birth Center Licensing

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- Birth Center Demonstration Program
- State Loan Repayment Program
- Health Care Worker Background Check
- Home Health, Home Services, and Home Nursing Agency
- Newborn and Infant Screening and Treatment
- Appendix A, AIDS Drug Assistance Program
- Life Care Facilities Contract
- Manufacturing, Processing, Packing or Holding of Food
- Mold Remediation Registration
- Illinois Community Health Worker (CHW) Certification Program\*\*

\*\*The SBOH devoted particular attention to the rules establishing the Illinois Community Health Worker (CHW) Certification Program. The SBOH provided detailed feedback aimed at strengthening program structure, accessibility, and implementation. These rules are currently advancing through the formal adoption process, which includes an opportunity for public comment prior to review and action by the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR). Our SBOH is confident that this initiative will expand trusted community-based care, strengthen workforce pathways, and enhance the integration of academic and community-based training programs.

In addition, the SBOH received briefings on IDPH legislative priorities for the upcoming sessions, as well as updates on proposed legislation anticipated to fall within IDPH's scope of authority.

## **IDPH Leadership**

Under the leadership of Director Vohra and Assistant Director Phillips, IDPH has expanded staffing in key functional areas, including Communications, Performance Management, Hospital Strategy, and Housing Stability Senior Policy. These investments are expected to further strengthen interagency coordination, promote innovation, and support cross-sector partnerships essential to advancing public health goals.

Director Vohra and Assistant Director Phillips regularly attend quarterly SBOH meetings, engaging SBOH members on emerging public health issues and research priorities aligned with Departmental needs. Informal Leadership Meetings held prior to each quarterly session further enhance collaboration and facilitate candid, productive dialogue between IDPH and the SBOH. These interactions remain invaluable to the effectiveness of our shared work.

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### **Quarterly Reports and Updates**

Throughout the year, the SBOH received comprehensive briefings from IDPH staff and subject-matter experts on a range of critical public health topics, including:

- Home Illinois: The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness overview (Eugenia Olison)
- Data modernization report (Abel Kho)
- Legislative session updates (Allison Nickrent)
- Administrative Rulemaking review and Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) processes (Allison Nickrent)
- State and federal policy updates (Matthew Smith)
- Illinois Department of Public Health immunization efforts (Jennifer Seo)
- SBOH Bylaws review (Karen Phelan)

Following a detailed review of our SBOH Bylaws dated June 2022, revisions were undertaken to ensure alignment with updated statutory responsibilities and training requirements.

Our SBOH Policy Committee, chaired by Damon Arnold, joined by multiple SBOH members, engaged in in-depth discussions on health justice, health equity, homelessness, and housing insecurities, public health data and metrics, societal impacts on health, the air pollution challenges encountered during the year, and strategies to strengthen public trust through transparent and consistent communication.

In addition, our SBOH Policy Committee reviewed the following topics:

- The loss of DEIA on the federal level
- The potentially devastating impact of the current presidential administration on public health efforts
- Clear and consistent public health messaging
- Food safety and security
- Federal updates impacting residents of our state
- Collaboration on priority areas – rural health and global health
- Cottage Food updates
- SNAP updates and assistance

With the support of the Chief Policy Officer, Matthew Smith, our 2026 SBOH Policy Committee remains resolute in advancing the principle of public health integration across all sectors of society, with continued attention to legislative and political factors influencing population health outcomes.

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SBOH members, in conjunction with IDPH, actively serve on committees and participate in external meetings, contributing expertise and maintaining strong connections with diverse constituencies. Notably, a Summit on Weather and Climate Change was convened this year, with the SBOH Co-Chair serving as a moderator in collaboration with the University of Illinois Chicago.

**State Health Assessment (SHA) and State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP)**

The General Assembly has been updated on progress related to Healthy Illinois 2028, the State's five-year State Health Improvement Plan. SBOH members continue to play active roles in the SHA/SHIP Partnership, the Implementation Core Team, and implementation planning efforts. In collaboration with IDPH, the SBOH remains focused on advancing the five core priority areas identified in Healthy Illinois 2028: chronic disease, emerging diseases, maternal and infant health, mental health and substance use disorder, and racism as a public health crisis.

In conclusion, the SBOH remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting the Director, the Assistant Director, IDPH, your Office, and the residents of Illinois. We will continue to fulfill our statutory advisory role with the goal of strengthening public health systems and improving health outcomes for all people in our great state.

Many thanks,

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