

## Partnerships and Coalitions

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Local health departments are the stewards of local public health. As a convener of public health at the local level, local health departments engage community stakeholders in a wide-range of outreach activities on a regular basis. Some engagement activities include:

- ❖ Form an advisory committee of community leaders and health experts to mobilize public support for the work of the local health department
- ❖ Attend council or town meetings to network, establish a presence, provide information, and dispel misperceptions
- ❖ Launch a city- or county-wide campaign, such as one to encourage citizens to collectively lose 100,000 pounds
- ❖ Visit schools to promote a student activity, such as a contest, field trip, extra-credit, or curricular exercise
- ❖ Speak to civic groups, such as the Rotary Club or the Chamber of Commerce, on a range of topics like the health department budget, vital statistics, or multi-drug resistant tuberculosis
- ❖ Meet with religious leaders to enlist their help in areas like emergency preparedness, chronic disease prevention, or breast cancer screening
- ❖ Present to a committee of the medical society or nursing association, to educate health professionals about what the local health department is doing

## Public Health Partnerships and Coalitions

Given the current state of available resources, it is essential for local health departments to engage community partners in the business of protecting the public's health. When independent outreach to community groups does not sufficiently accomplish the desired goal, local health departments can establish informal partnerships and formal coalitions.

By combining the expertise, sensibilities, and resources of local health departments, business and labor groups, academia, health professional associations, health care providers, community activists, consumers, and other governmental and non-governmental agencies, a public health partnership or coalition can:

- ❖ Create synergies by uniting diverse interests behind a single goal, such as women's health or better air quality

- ❖ Raise the profile of a public health issue, such as excessive hospital admissions or sex abuse of women migrant farm workers
- ❖ Reach out to under-served populations, such as immigrants from Central America or the Hmong, by working with religious, ethnic-specific, and other organizations they trust
- ❖ Help change behavior on a community-wide scale, such as tobacco use or level of exercise
- ❖ Attract funding for a cause, such as a clinic or support for families with mental health problems, by showing private funders there's a solid platform for sustainable action and showing public officials the cause has a strong constituency

## The Role of Communications in a Partnership or Coalition

The secret to every effective partnership is communications. Communications is often the glue that holds a group together. It also represents the face of the group to the public.

In many cases, local health departments are best suited to coordinate a group's communications efforts to ensure that the group's messages and strategies are consistent with those of the department. If the local health department is not equipped to take the lead, it should substantively contribute to all group communications.

**Tip: Seek Input from Partners Prior to Making Decisions about Communications:** In developing messages for the public, "What do you think about this" is a useful and welcome approach.