



The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department Story

April 19, 2007

Healthy People Build Strong Communities – The Lawrence and Douglas County community has benefited from a strong public health presence for more than 120 years. On your behalf, the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department works to:

- Safeguard community health and safety through swift response to illness outbreaks;
- Identify urgent and everyday health problems by tracking the health of the community to identify health trends early on;
- Assess health problems and promote wellness by fostering community health initiatives; and
- Collaborate with community partners to protect health and control the costs associated with health problems.

Past

In 1885, the City of Lawrence hired its first Health Officer to control filth-borne epidemics. In 1942, Douglas County participated with the City of Lawrence in the creation of a joint city-county health department. The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department continues to serve as the local public health authority to this day.

Between 1885 and 1942 public health experienced significant growth. Noteworthy achievements include: establishment of a Kansas Board of Health in 1885; the formation of a U.S. Public Health Service in 1889; expansion from a City of Lawrence Health Officer position to a City of Lawrence Health Unit in 1929. Collectively these agencies helped the local public health authority respond to multiple epidemics of smallpox, typhoid fever, polio and most significantly the 1918-19 Spanish Flu; sanitation programs commenced in the late 1920's.

Issues of sanitation and the prevention of vaccine preventable diseases dominated the era between 1942 and the 1960's. In the 1960's and 1970's the Health Department's philosophy was defined to focus on preventive health care and environmental health. The Health Department played a key role in establishing the Health Care Access Clinic for the medically uninsured; the Bert Nash Community Mental Health Facility; and the Visiting Nurses Association.

Present

With a professional, knowledgeable and passionate staff, the Health Department pursues its mission to prevent disease and protect and promote the health of the people of Lawrence and Douglas County. Recently, the Health Department was instrumental in helping the City of Lawrence establish a tobacco use ordinance and continues to provide leadership and

infrastructure support to the Community Health Improvement Project. Additionally, several staff members serve on social service agency boards such as Health Care Access and the Douglas County Dental Clinic. Recognized at both state and national levels for achieving excellence in public health service delivery, the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department maintains strong partnerships within the civic, academic, and social service communities, providing services at reasonable rates to all people in the community

Future

The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department is prepared to continue leading the way in public health. This begins by helping the people we serve understand the benefits of a strong public health presence. In order to affect positive change in population health outcomes we intend to:

- be more visible in the community by expanding our community partnerships and using technologies such as the internet, public service announcements and more effective mass communication messaging to expand access to Health Department information and resources;
- establish stronger ties with local policy makers and elected officials by educating public officials on the scope and function of the department and providing information that is timely, accurate, concise and germane to the issue at hand;
- use our expertise in public health principles to remain focused on health outcomes rather than program outputs so that we more completely understand the impact our services have on the health of the public; and,
- commit to practicing cultural sensitivity in order to understand barriers to service, health disparities and serve all segments of our community.

We will serve the entire community, not just the individuals using our direct services.

As a public health leader we will monitor the health of Lawrence and Douglas County residents seeking to identify new and emerging health issues, adjusting services as needed to accommodate a changing community. The Health Department will improve service delivery and employee job satisfaction by creating business and workforce development plans that include broad public health principles, emphasizing flexibility and empowerment.

As the face of public health in Lawrence and Douglas County evolves, the Health Department remains committed to tackling the challenges ahead. Public health is important to all of us because *Healthy People Build Strong Communities*.