

News Release



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Celebrating 100 years of public health: *How the past has made public health matter*

This year marks the 100th anniversary of two legislative acts that shaped the future of public health in Ohio. The Hughes Act and Griswold Act, both enacted in 1919, established the modern day organization of local health departments and laid the foundation for public health efforts still in effect today.

As part of National Public Health Week, April 1-7, the Knox County Health Department is joining local health departments throughout Ohio to collectively celebrate 100 years of public health with a coordinated promotional campaign themed "How the past has made public health matter." The health department kicked off the celebration Thursday with the signing of a proclamation by the Knox County Commissioners recognizing the anniversary and accomplishments of public health.

In addition to County Commissioners Teresa Bemiller and Bill Pursel, on hand for the proclamation signing were Edward Bowlus, DMV, of Fredericktown who served on the Knox County Board of Health from 1982-2007 and was president of the board for 17 years; Lee Rhoades, a current member of the board since 2000 and past board president; Mount Vernon Mayor Richard Mavis who was a county commissioner and oversaw the combining of the county and city health departments in 1983; and Julie E. Miller, current health commissioner.

In the 100 years that have passed since the enactment of Hughes-Griswold, public health has had a significant impact on health and quality of life: People are living an average of 25 years longer; small pox, once a common, deadly occurrence, has been eradicated; motor vehicle fatalities have been reduced by 90 percent and deaths from sudden infant death syndrome have decreased 50 percent.

Also among the accomplishments of public health are: immunizations for children and adults, the control of infectious diseases, reduction of tobacco use, safer and healthier foods; better maternal and infant healthcare; increased preventative screenings, and public health preparedness and response.

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How the past has made public health matter

The Hughes-Griswold acts were a continuation of public health organization that that began with founding of the state board of health in 1886 and a 1906 law that provided that each city, village and township send a delegate to the state board's annual meeting. This is where many city health departments got their start.

As a result of the 1906 law, there were 2,158 independent health units in Ohio representing cities, villages and townships. The variety and quality of services varied greatly. After a statewide smallpox epidemic in 1917 and the nationwide influenza epidemic in 1918, it became clear that a more comprehensive and formalized approach to public health was necessary. The Hughes-Griswold acts provided that approach and as written in the 1920 *Ohio Public Health Journal of the Ohio State Board of Health*, it "strengthens the hands of those charged with responsibility for people's health as nothing else could have done."

Hughes-Griswold eliminated the village and township units and based local health administration onto cities and counties. A uniform structure for each health district was established, including boards of health and who should be on the board, plus the creation of the district advisory council which appointed people to the board of health. The process of combining districts was also outlined. A minimum of three full-time employees were required for each district: a health officer, a public health nurse and a clerk.

The 1916 legislation also spoke to specific "duties" for each district including basic services still performed today by local health departments . Those services include data collection, control and prevention of communicable disease, food safety, birth and death records, inspection and abatement of nuisances and as written in the original legislation, "all steps necessary to protect the public's health and to prevent disease."

While the last 100 years have been filled with much success and progress, the next 100 years promises to show the ever-growing presence and importance of public health in our everyday lives. From the continued emphasis on the importance of immunizations , maternal and child health, food safety and vector surveillance, there are new horizons including dental care, substance abuse, health equity, national accreditation, food deserts and cross-sector partnerships.

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