

## What is a Board of Health and What Does it Do?

### What is a Board of Health?

A local board of health is an advisory body for a local health department. Currently there are 85 local health departments in Wisconsin: having county, multi-county, city-county, city, village, and multi-city/village health departments.

Boards of health governance varies across Wisconsin from being advisory in nature to adopting regulations. For a single county health department with either a county executive or a county administrator, the county executive or county administrator may assume the powers and duties of a local board of health.

Wisconsin Statute Chapter [251.03](#) outlines local board of health membership requirements, and the appointment and confirmation process. The governing body of the local health department shall specify the length of terms of members and provide for staggered terms. In terms of members, a Board of Health shall have:

- No more than nine members.
- At least three members not elected officials or employees of the governing body and who have a demonstrated interest or competence in the field of public health or community health.
- A good faith effort to appoint a registered nurse and a physician. *Note:* On March 14, 2022, Senate Bill 312 was signed by Governor Evers which allows local government leadership to appoint a physician assistant, advance practice registered nurse, or both, if unable to find a willing physician or registered nurse.
- Reflect the diversity of the community.

Requirements for appointment and membership are different for city, village, or town who have a multiple municipal local health department and for a village or town with a health department established prior to January 1, 1994.

### What Does a Board of Health Do?

Wisconsin Statute Chapter [251.04](#) outlines the powers and duties of a board of health. The powers and duties of the board of health include:

- Advises the local health department.
- Assure the local health department is a Level I, Level II, or Level III.
- Report to the state department as required by rule.
- Meet at least quarterly.
- Assess public health needs and advocate for the provision of reasonable and necessary public health services.
- Review policy and provide leadership that fosters local involvement and commitment in the community, that emphasizes public health needs and that advocates for equitable distribution of public health resources and complementary private activities commensurate with public health needs.
- Assure measures are taken to provide an environment in which individuals can be healthy.

Boards of Health reporting relationship to other committees, councils, or boards varies across Wisconsin. In Iowa County, the Board of Health is advisory to the Health and Human Services Committee.

**What are some examples of how boards of health powers and duties get carried out?**

- Contribute to the DHS 140 review process in confirming the level of service for the health department.
- Review and revise board of health regulations for human health hazards and licensing programs.
- Pass a resolution in support of a local or statewide policy.
- Attend meetings, training, events hosted or sponsored by the health department.
- Bring forward public health issues identified by residents and community leaders.
- Meet with local elected officials to discuss perceived needs and possible resources.
- Meet with state elected officials to keep them abreast of public health issues and policy initiatives.
- Participate in the community health assessment and development of a community health improvement plan.
- Review annual budget.

At the national level, the National Association of Local Boards of Health identified six function of public health governance that provides additional examples of duties. The six functions include: policy development, resource stewardship, legal authority, partner engagement, continuous improvement, and oversight. To learn more about the six functions visit [https://cdn.ymaws.com/nalboh.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/Governance\\_Functions.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/nalboh.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/Governance_Functions.pdf).

**What State and National Associations Resources are Available for Boards of Health?**

The Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards (WALHDAB) is the statewide leader and voice for local governmental public health. Local health departments and their boards of health are eligible for membership. Governance is by a Board of Directors who represent both Boards of Health and Health Officers. To learn more visit <https://www.walhdab.org/>

The National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH) informs, guides, and is the national voice for Boards of Health. Boards of Health are eligible for membership. Uniquely positioned to deliver technical expertise in governance and leadership, board development, health priorities, and public health policy, NALBOH strives to strengthen good governance where public health begins—at the local level. NALBOH has created tools where boards that govern health departments can assess their own activities against a standard, and non-governing advisory boards can better understand their important role in the governance process. To learn more about NALBOH and governance resources visit <https://www.nalboh.org/>

April 15, 2022