



## INTRODUCTION TO WISCONSIN PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITIES

The state of Wisconsin has laws to protect its residents from injury, disease, disability, and death. Public health laws are carried out at the state level by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and at the local level by boards of health and local and tribal health departments.

The **Department of Health Services** has broad powers and authorities. It is the lead agency for public health and maintains a public health system (in cooperation with local health departments and medical clinics operated by federally recognized tribes). It establishes statewide health objectives and delegates power to local health departments to achieve them. The Department of Health has authority to issue and enforce orders governing the duties of local health officers and local boards of health. The Secretary of the Department of Health Services appoints a state health officer and assigns duties.

**Local boards of health** are the policymaking bodies for local health departments. Local boards of health and health officers enforce public health statutes and rules. Local authorities may pass health ordinances as long as the ordinances complement and do not conflict with state laws. Several statutes authorize local authorities to enact ordinances on particular subjects, such as lead poisoning, radiation, human health hazards, and food and lodging.

**Local health departments** are responsible for the surveillance and control of communicable diseases and for human health hazard control. **Local health officers** lead the health departments. Local health departments may take reasonable and necessary action for the prevention and suppression of disease. The local health department may act as an agent of the Department of Health Services during an emergency.

**Tribal health departments:** The 11 federally recognized tribes operate health programs through contracts with the Indian Health Service. Services provided vary from tribe-to-tribe and may include direct care as well as referrals to other providers. Tribal health departments frequently collaborate with the Department of Health Services and local health departments to address threats to health, such as communicable and chronic disease and environmental health hazards.

The [Wisconsin Public Health Authorities Fact Sheet](#) provides an overview of legal authority in areas of public health including (1) health administration and supervision, (2) communicable diseases, (3) maternal and child health, (4) environmental health, (5) chronic disease and injuries, (6) emergency medical services, and (7) emergency volunteer health care practitioners. It describes the authority of each of the above health bodies to carry out broad public health functions, such as (1) management and supervision; (2) information collection, analysis, and dissemination; (3) care and treatment, (4) investigations, (5) adoption of rules, policies, and guidelines, and (6) enforcement.

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