

HEALTH DEPARTMENT & BOARD OF HEALTH

Fiscal Year 2007

The mission of the Amherst Board of Health, working through the Health Department, is to promote the health and wellbeing of our community with special emphasis on eliminating health disparities. We fulfill this mission through our core functions: assessment, assurance, promotion, and policy development.

Assurance: ensuring that all Amherst residents have the services necessary to maintain or restore good health either by coordinating the delivery of services by other agencies, by policy or regulation development, or by providing services directly.

Assessment: systematically collecting, assembling, analyzing, and making available information regarding the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs, and epidemiological studies of health problems.

Promotion: providing services and educational opportunities that encourage healthy environments and healthy lifestyles.

Policy Development: development and implementation of comprehensive public health policies, regulations and legislation.

The work of the Amherst Health Department is organized into six major areas: Access to Health Care, Infectious Disease Control, Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Environmental Health, Health Policy and Planning Emergency Preparedness.

I. Access to Health Care

Ensuring access to health care for all Amherst residents continues to be a priority for the Department. Some of the Departmental programs to address these concerns are:

Hampshire Health Connect, “Peace in the Family: a Khmer Community Project,” the Nursing Center, and the Convalescent Equipment Loan Program. We continue to look for resources to expand our services to other newcomer populations.

Hampshire Health Connect

Hampshire Health Connect (HHC) is a nonprofit organization created by a group of citizens, providers and representatives of local government, businesses, and insurers. Its aim is to link families and individuals who are underinsured or who have no health insurance with insurance programs that they may be eligible for or to medical providers willing to see HHC patients at no charge or on a sliding fee scale. HHC is housed in Cooley Dickinson Hospital. The Health Director, Epi Bodhi, is currently secretary of the Board of Directors of HHC.

Thanks to several grants, HHC was able to engage the services of a Latina caseworker, who has been working out of the Amherst Health Department to enroll all Amherst residents, but especially those whose first language is Spanish, in the program. As a result of this, Amherst residents’ participation in HHC as well as the number of Latino clients served by HHC continues to rise.

In the past year, 427 Amherst residents were served. The enactment of Health Care Reform has had a great impact on the work of Hampshire Health Connect. Many who believed they were ineligible for state benefits are now seeking the help of HHC to enroll in the Commonwealth Care Programs.

Cambodian Health

The Cambodian Outreach Worker position was fully funded this past fiscal year through a combination of Town funds and grants received from organizations wanting to support this work. The Outreach Worker continues to provide services and advocate for the Cambodian community.

Outreach Worker Lauren Srey continues to work with Khmer Health Advocates to provide medical and mental health services for Cambodians. She has also worked with many of the elders to help them become United States citizens.

Lauren Srey helps residents in a variety of reasons. Here are some of them:

- 49 citizen Immigration issues
- 156 cases of Medical assistance
- 24 Home visits
- 12 employment assistance cases
- 65 housing issues
- 9 court issues
- 11 Mediation assistance cases in local schools.

Nursing Center Services

Under the Health Department's staff supervision, the Senior Nursing Center provided preventative healthcare for Amherst seniors until January 2007. The office operated eight hours a week. In January it was decided to begin a process of reevaluation of this service. The Health Director, Public Health Nurse and Board of Health Chair met with Senior Center Staff and members of their Wellness Committee to determine the best course of action. It was decided to return supervision of the Senior Nursing Center to the Senior Center, although Health Department staff will continue to serve in an advisory capacity. The Public Health Nurse participated in the revised job description. The VNA of Hampshire County was brought in to help ensure continuity and quality assurance.

Convalescent Equipment Lending Program

Kathryn Drake, Health Department Office Administrator, maintains a loan closet for citizens in need by loaning equipment, handling returns, and receiving equipment donations. Convalescent equipment includes walkers, commodes, shower chairs, tub transfer benches, tub safety rails, canes, crutches, dressing sticks, bedrails, and a limited number of wheelchairs. During FY 07, approximately 103 Amherst residents borrowed 154 pieces of equipment; returned approximately 60 pieces, and donated approximately 12 pieces of convalescent equipment. The need for lending equipment has increased significantly. Requests for equipment have exceeded the actual availability of equipment.

II. Infectious Disease Control

Controlling the spread of communicable diseases and food-borne illnesses is an important function of the Health Department.

Infectious Disease Surveillance and Control during FY 07 included the following:

- 2 cases of active Tuberculosis
- 5 cases of Tb prevention and control
- 12,731 doses of vaccine distributed to eleven Amherst providers
- two flu clinics, in conjunction with the Council on Aging, provided vaccines for Flu, Pneumonia and Tetanus to 273 residents
- Health Fair for Town employees
- monthly immunization clinics, providing 140 immunizations to adults and children
- 6 cases of Salmonella, 3 cases of Shigella, 1 case of Chickenpox, 14 cases of Pertussis, 11 cases of hepatitis B, 20 cases of Lyme Disease, 1 case of Cryptosporidiosis, 1 case of E Coli, 2 cases of Babesiosis, 1 case of Viral Meningitis, 1 case of Ehrlichiosis, 4 cases of Strep Pneumonia

III. Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Programs aimed at promoting health and preventing disease are another important aspect of the Health Department's work. Programs and interventions are either for the general public or are targeted to certain groups that are at increased health risk because of their membership in a particular demographic group, or as consequences of their own behavior or the behavior of others.

High risk groups

- The Public Health Nurse and Inspectors work together in a team approach to address the multi-faceted problem of hoarding, via joint inspections that include mental health assessments and referrals to social services.
- The Health Director and Public Health Nurse work with the Council on Aging to ensure that seniors are offered high-quality nursing services.
- Town of Amherst Handicapped Permits are available to residents of Amherst who have a temporary or chronic condition that substantially limits their mobility. This permit allows residents to park in handicapped spaces within the Town of Amherst. A permit may be obtained from the Amherst Health Department. A doctor's certificate stating the condition and the expected duration of the disability is required. This permit WILL NOT extend any privileges beyond Town limits, or to the area colleges.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse Education

The Health Director continues to be active in several Town, University, and School efforts to examine alcohol abuse, underage drinking, and substance abuse. The Amherst Board of Health received a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in 1999 to help address this problem of substance abuse in the High School.

The Health Department used this final year of funding of the Drug-Free Communities Grant to evaluate the program and decide on next steps. The Western Massachusetts Center for Healthy Communities conducted a series of interviews with parents, students, and others who have participated in this effort. These results were presented at a

community meeting in January. A group of interested parents have formed a new organization, entitled Partnership for Amherst Children-Teen (PACT), which is working with professionals to carry on this important work. In June, PACT invited community members to a kick-off luncheon.

Programs targeting youth that the Partnership funded included, for the fifth year in a row, the Challenge Day Program for 200 youth and 40 adults. This program is designed to engage youth in an interactive process where youth challenge themselves to understand different forms of oppression that are often the basis of behavior affecting the social climate (such as violence, drug and alcohol use, truancy, bullying, etc.). This program is an integral part of the school district's effort to improve the climate of the school.

Social Justice Grant

The Amherst Health Department was one of four communities chosen nationwide to receive the Social Justice Grant from the Kellogg Foundation to address the social determinants of health disparities. The Amherst Health Department widened its focus to include all of the governing departments of the Town to identify the most effective way to eliminate health disparities.

IV. Environmental Issues

The Board of Health is required by State statute to perform many duties relating to the protection of public health, and disease control, and to advocate sanitary living conditions.

The Board of Health's Environmental Health Division staff consists of 2 Health Inspectors and 1 part-time Administrative Assistant. Their responsibility is to enforce the laws. This fiscal year, our department experienced a loss of work hours due to a temporary leave for our Administrative Assistant and Senior Sanitarian. With minimal staffing, the Department made every effort to fulfill the required semi-annual inspections. We managed to successfully conduct 1,077 inspections and issued 367 Town permits.

Food Safety

The Environmental Health Division inspected 205 food handlers during FY 07. We administer permits for all food handlers, encompassing: restaurants, recreational camps, bed and breakfast operations, residential kitchens, college institutions, hotels, motels, retail food stores, schools, mobile food units, temporary events, caterers, bakeries, and frozen food establishments.

Routine inspections and the perseverance of this division is crucial to protecting the public health. The division enforces Chapter X of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standard for Food Establishments, 105 CMR 590.000. These State laws allow the Town of Amherst to conduct inspections, issue orders and suspend or revoke permits where necessary.

Since the State's adoption of the 1999 Federal Food Code, the Environmental Health Division has collaborated with local restaurants to be in compliance with new regulations. The code requires all restaurants to have a person in charge (PIC) who has knowledge of food-borne disease prevention and application of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. We will continue to monitor food managers to ensure the obtainment of their Food Manager Certification and to develop a food protection program. This fiscal year, David Zarozinski (Sanitarian) organized a Food Manager Certification program and enrolled local

restaurant managers, along with Department peers Tom Dion (Assistant Sanitarian) and Ruth Taylor (Administrative Assistant).

Body Art Establishments

There are three body art establishments and 16 licensed practitioners in Amherst. The Board of Health has made a few amendments outlining the policies under Restrictions, Recordkeeping and Standards of Practice, effective May 31st, 2007. The Inspectors were able to conduct 6 inspections.

Massage Therapy & Tanning

Under authority of Section 31 of Chapter 111 and Sections 51 and 53, Chapter 140 of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (M.G.L.), the Health Department issued a total of 45 permits to massage therapists, massage establishments, and tanning operations. Unfortunately, due to the lack of staff, inspections were limited.

Swimming Pools

No person may operate or maintain any swimming, wading or special purpose pool without obtaining a permit from the Health Department. The permit is subject to the requirements of 105 CMR 435.00 and to any regulations as may be adopted by the Board of Health, provided, however, that said local board of health regulations are not applicable to a State-owned or-operated swimming, wading, or special purpose pool. The Health Department issued 20 swimming pool permits, four of which were residential.

Recreational Camps

We continue to perform extensive monitoring and inspections to sustain quality and assurance of compliance. This fiscal year, there were 23 recreational camps.

Camp operators can request CORI's and SORI's online. The turnaround time for such a request is estimated to be 4-5 business days. We recommended that all camp operators use the online feature. As a result, some camps that had fallen behind on criminal and sexual history requests were able to get results in time for their scheduled inspection.

Throughout the year we receive new information from the Community Sanitation Program. The Department makes every effort to forward the new material and information to all of our camp operators in a timely manner. Although the Environmental Health Division continues to distribute informational packets, these packets are now made available online.

Housing

The Health Department has the authority to pursue all nuisance and housing complaints. In accordance with Chapter II of the State Sanitary Code: Minimum Standards of Fitness for Human Habitation, M.G.L. c.111, ss. 127A and 127B: 105 CMR 410.000, upon a citizen's request or on its own initiative, the Health Department can certify violations, issue orders, hold hearings, grant variances and institute court proceedings, if necessary to enforce such orders. This fiscal year, our Housing Inspector conducted 131 inspections including fraternities, sororities and voucher-program related issues.

M.G.L. c.111, s.122, allows the Health Department to investigate nuisances which in the Board's opinion may be injurious to the public health. The Health Department may destroy, prevent or

remove such nuisances and make appropriate regulations. There were 119 nuisance complaints, mostly involving trash. All nuisance complaints were addressed and abated.

Subdivisions

BOH has 45 days to review and approve or disapprove preliminary and definitive plans for the subdivision of land, in accordance with M.G.L. c.41, ss.81S-81V. Failure to act is deemed an approval. The Health Department considers drainage, water pollution, sewage and potential damage to well fields. This fiscal year, we reviewed 3 subdivision plans.

Septic System

The Environmental Health Department enforces the State 310 CMR 15.000, Environmental Code, Title 5: Standard requirements for the siting, construction, inspection, upgrade, expansion of on-site sewage treatment, for the transport and disposal of septage. This fiscal year, our health inspectors conducted 17 percolation tests and 17 septic system finals.

Septage and Garbage

The Health Department enforces Title V of the State Environmental Code: Minimum Requirements for the Subsurface Disposal of Sewage, 310 CMR 15.000. We issued 18 permits for the removal or transportation of garbage and offal this fiscal year.

West Nile Virus

The Department continues to educate residents about measures to prevent becoming infected with West Nile Virus (WNV). In FY 07, 2 dead birds were reported for monitoring purposes to the Health Department; neither of the birds was submitted for testing.

V. Emergency Preparedness

The Health Department continues to develop a volunteer medical provider pool through the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Program. There are currently 30 health care providers on the Amherst MRC roster. The Amherst MRC has held monthly training sessions since the fall of 2004. The group is trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS) operations, Shelter Operations, and other public health emergency and disaster preparedness-related topics. The group is planning a variety of public health outreach and education projects, including a health fair for senior citizens. Health Department staff are involved in several local preparedness organizations such as the Hampshire Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coalition, the Metropolitan Medical Response System, and Five-College Public Safety Emergency Preparedness. The Health Department, Board of Health and MRC were key partners in planning and executing a Western Massachusetts emergency drill that took place on April 12th, 2007. The Town's Emergency Operation Center was opened and the Health Director participated in the exercise and evaluation.

VI. Health Policy and Planning

The Board of Health is responsible for setting policies and creating regulations to protect the health of Amherst residents. Board of Health members are: Nancy DiMattio (Chair), Ellen Pile, Sarina Ergas, Sandra Sulsky, and Alan Weiner. Under Massachusetts General Law, as well as State and local regulations, boards of health have a broad range of responsibilities for making and enforcing policies that promote and protect the health of citizens.

The Board must conduct an in-depth analysis of the many issues that come before it. This year, issues have included senior nursing services; body arts, including tattooing and piercing; water integrity; smoking in apartments, and obesity in school-age children.

The Board is concerned about emergency preparedness and spent time at every meeting going through different aspects of the Town's emergency preparedness efforts for public health. The Board seeks to delineate its role, as well as staff's, in an emergency. The Board has worked with other Town departments as well as other agencies in our region to ensure that we are prepared.

The Health Director is an active member of the Board of Directors of NACCHO (National Association of County and City Health Officials.) She is a member of the Social Justice Committee as well as the Task Force to develop an operational definition of Local Public Health.

The Health Department works with agencies in public health as well as human services throughout the County to ensure that all residents have access to needed services; as such, she is an active member of Strategic Planning Initiative for Families and Youth (SPIFFY) as well as the Healthy Communities Committee of Cooley Dickenson Hospital. The Health Director was asked to represent the Massachusetts Public Health Association as a participant in the Coalition for Local Public Health, a statewide coalition made up of representatives of the five statewide organizations that advocate for local public health. The Coalition works with State officials to ensure that Massachusetts residents receive the best public health services available.

FY 07 Board of Health

Nancy DiMattio, Chair
Ellen Leahy-Pile
Sandy Sulsky
Alan Weiner, MD
Epi Bodhi, Health Director