

Preparation for the January 8, 2024 Topical Seminar at the Lewes Library at 3 PM

Please review the materials below and submit a written response of at least 200 words.

Email your response to lewesseminar@gmail.com by Monday, January 6. Please read your fellow participants' responses before our meeting on Wednesday, January 8.

EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

This session is focused on the Effectiveness of Public Health. In pursuing this topic an understanding of the term *effectiveness* and a definition of *public health* is required. The context of public health delivery in terms of institutional structure should be examined.

I. EFFECTIVENESS

In a business management context, effectiveness refers to the degree to which a strategy or action achieves its intended goals and desired outcomes, essentially meaning "doing the right things". In public policy, "effectiveness" refers to the degree to which a policy achieves its intended objectives, essentially measuring how well a policy is working in practice to produce the desired outcomes, considering both positive impacts and any unintended consequences; it is a factor in assessing the overall success of a policy initiative. In public health, effectiveness is the degree to which a program or intervention achieves its intended outcomes in real-world settings. It's a measure of how well a program improves health and prevents disease in a population.

II. What is Public Health?

Public health is the science of protecting and improving the health of communities. This work is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing and responding to infectious diseases, and regulating activities that expose the population to health risks (e.g. restaurant inspections). Overall, public health is concerned with protecting the health of the entire population. These populations can be as small as a local neighborhood, or as big as an entire country or region of the world.

☐ **Focus:** community

☐ **Emphasis:** prevention & health promotion

This is in comparison to Health Care.

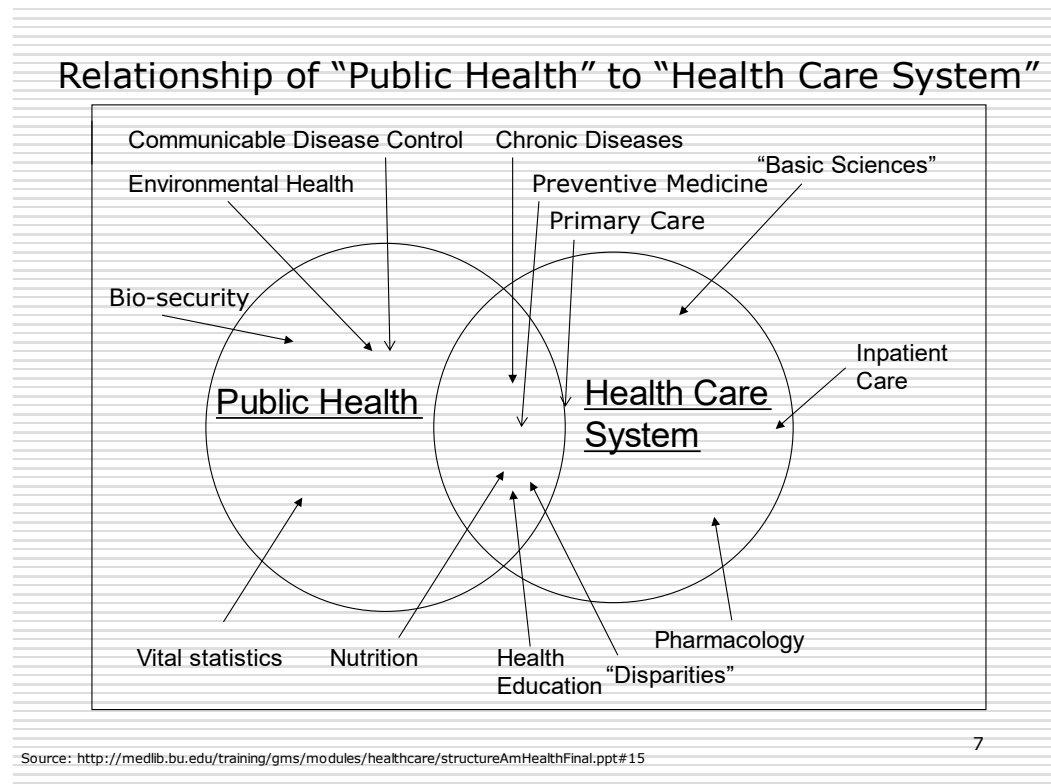
Healthcare refers to efforts made to maintain, restore, or promote an individual's physical, mental, or emotional well-being, especially when performed by trained and licensed professionals.

☐ **Focus:** a patient

☐ **Emphasis:** diagnosis & cure

Public Health generally is funded and managed under public (government) authority whereas health care is predominately a private and non-profit owned business enterprise funded by private payors, private insurance, and publicly funded insurance.

Many people conflate public health and health care. Though they are two distinct areas of activity, there are overlaps.



In 1988 The Institute of Medicine identified three core functions of Public Health . Public health officials use these functions to ensure communities have access to the services needed to be healthy communities.

The three core functions of public health are:

- **Assessment**

Collect and analyze information about health problems in communities. This includes monitoring health status, diagnosing and investigating health problems, and using epidemiological surveillance systems.

- **Policy development**

Involve stakeholders in the process of developing policies and plans to support health. This includes informing people about health issues, mobilizing communities to act, and developing leadership and health system plans.

- **Assurance**

Ensure that public health services are provided to communities and individuals. This includes enforcing laws and regulations and linking people to health services.

III. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

In the US, the public health system involves a multitude of agencies at the federal, state, and local level. At the federal level at least 5 executive departments are involved in varying aspects of public health. The fifty states each have a state health agency in some form either as a freestanding executive department or part of a social services super agency. And at the local level there are some 2500 local departments at the city or county level.

Besides governmental agencies there are non-profit charitable and voluntary associations, non-governmental organizations, foundations, and academic institutions participating in public health. Lastly, there are some private for-profit entities that engage in this arena.

This institutional structure results in public health being intertwined with politics. Historically public health has always been a form of political action—or inertia. Public health initiatives and policies are inherently political, as they represent government intervention and require legislation and resource allocation, which are all influenced by political considerations, including different ideologies, power dynamics, and public opinion.

It is necessary for public health professionals to engage with the political landscape to have an impact. Thus, public health can become controversial because, depending upon how it is defined, it may challenge people's values and demand sacrifices and may involve conflicts between individual rights and the needs of the entire community.

IV. THE STATUS OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN US TODAY

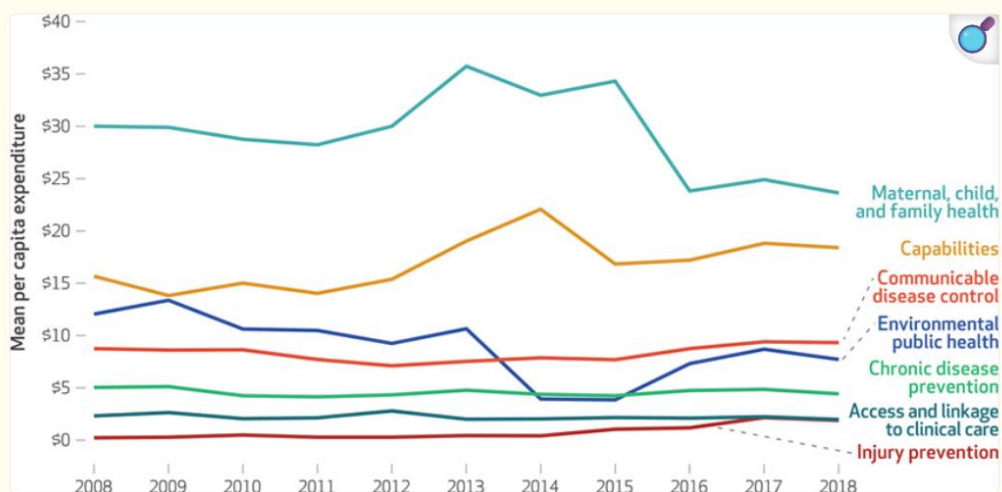
The Commonwealth Fund Commission on a National Public Health System found that:

- Public health efforts are not organized for success. Despite dozens of federal health agencies and nearly 3,000 state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments, there is no single person or office at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to lead and coordinate the nation's public health efforts.
- Public health funding is not sufficient or reliable. The chronic underfunding of public health has left behind a weak infrastructure, with antiquated data systems, an overworked and stressed workforce, laboratories in disrepair, and other major gaps.

- Expectations for health agencies are minimal. Funding is not tied to a set of basic standards for the capabilities of state, local, tribal, and territorial health departments.
 - The health care system is missing opportunities to support health improvement. It is difficult to convert collaboration with public health agencies during emergencies into sustainable work to address day-to-day health challenges.
 - The public health enterprise is facing a crisis in trust. This crisis relates to experiences with racism and discrimination, ideological opposition, and misinformation.
- (<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/TCF-002%20National%20Public%20Health%20System%20Report-r5-final.pdf>)

Federal and state investment in public health funding for core public health infrastructure remained flat for the past decade while the nation's population and health risks grew.

EXHIBIT 1. State governmental spending trends in public health activities, 2008–18.



[Open in a new tab](#)

SOURCE Authors' analysis of data from the Census Bureau, Census of Governments, 2018.

NOTE Per capita expenditure values are real (inflation-adjusted) 2018 US dollars.

\Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hus/topics/health-status.htm#featured-charts>

Metrics to measure the effectiveness of a nation's public health

To measure the effectiveness of a nation's public health, key metrics include: life expectancy at birth, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, disease prevalence rates for major illnesses, immunization rates, access to preventive healthcare, healthy lifestyle indicators (like smoking rates and obesity rates), and mortality rates from preventable causes; all of which provide insights into the overall health status of a population and the effectiveness of public health interventions.

VI WHAT TO CONSIDER

Considering the current state of the US public health system, how effective is it in preventing disease and responding to major public health emergencies, and what are the key challenges that need to be addressed to improve its overall effectiveness?

Here are some key points you might wish to examine to consider in your essay:

- **Disease prevention:**

How successful is the public health system in implementing preventative measures like vaccinations, health education campaigns, and screening programs to combat chronic diseases?

- **Emergency preparedness:**

How well is the system equipped to respond to and mitigate major public health emergencies like pandemics, natural disasters, or outbreaks?

- **Preventive healthcare:**

How well does the US public health system ensure access to preventative care and essential services for all populations, especially vulnerable groups like low-income individuals and rural communities?

- **Funding and resource allocation:**

Is the current funding for public health initiatives sufficient to effectively carry out necessary interventions and programs at the federal, state, and local levels?

- **Political influence:**

How do political factors impact the implementation and effectiveness of public health policies and programs?

- **Community engagement:**

To what extent does the public health system actively involve communities in decision-making and program design to ensure relevance and effectiveness?

- **Policy proposals:**

What potential policy changes could enhance the effectiveness of the public health system, such as increased funding for preventive services, addressing social determinants of health, or strengthening public health emergency response capabilities?

Submitted by Doug Adams seminar leader.