

**Brief History and Background:  
The City of Seattle's Role in Public Health  
March, 2010**

- **1877, City Health Officer.** The Seattle City Council created the position of City Health Officer.
- **1890, Board of Health.** The City established a Department of Sanitation, under the direction of the Board of Health, which also appointed the Health Officer.
- **1908, Department of Health.** An amended City Charter replaced the Board of Health with a new Department of Health, with a Commissioner of Health appointed by the Mayor.
- **1951, Joint department administered by the City.** In 1951, the Seattle Department of Health merged with the King County Department of Health; the joint department was administered by the City of Seattle, with funding provided by the City and County proportionate to their populations.
- **1981, Joint department administered by the County.** In 1981, Public Health became a County-administered department. (It wasn't until 1996 when all Health department employees became County employees rather than City employees.)
- **1984 Interlocal Agreement.** In 1984, the City and County entered into an Interlocal Agreement that outlined the administration, structure and funding of the Public Health Department.
- **1995, County responsibility; joint city-county health departments.** Per RCW 70.46.085, adopted in 1993 and effective in 1995, Washington State designated counties as the entities that have responsibility for public health including bearing the expense of providing public health services. In addition, RCW 70.08.010 authorizes the establishment of combined city-county health departments for cities with a population of more than 100,000.
- **1996, Elimination of Public Health's City Division.** Prior to 1996, Public Health organizationally included a City of Seattle Division that administered the City funding and oversaw many of the health services provided within Seattle. The City Division Director was considered the City's 'person' at Public Health. There also had been a County Division. Dr. Alonzo Plough, the former Public Health Director, implemented an organizational change that eliminated the City and County Divisions.
- **1996 Interlocal Agreement.** The 1996 agreement, which governs the City's current relationship with Public Health, states that, "The County has ultimate policy and statutory responsibility for the delivery of public health services. The City has fiduciary and policy responsibility over its own financial contribution and strong and directive influence on overall policies of the Department which impact public health assessment and services in the City. The City's financial contributions are voluntary and shall be used to enhance services for its citizens." It further states that the "County shall be financially responsible for the funding of health services throughout the County."
- **Early 2000's, Reduction of City Funds to Public Health.** In the first half of the past decade, the issue of core vs. enhanced services was a contentious issue resulting in

several City and County reviews. The City had two major concerns about how Public Health was utilizing its City General Fund, believing that:

- in some cases Public Health was using City funding to subsidize core public health services for which the County was responsible, rather than for enhanced services, and
- the City was paying more than it should in administrative/indirect charges.

Because of these concerns, and to a lesser extent due to the economic downturn and need for budget reductions, City General Fund investments in public health declined by 36.5% from 2001 to 2005.

- **2005, Structural change in the City’s funding relationship with Public Health.** Prior to 2005, City funds were appropriated directly to Public Health as they were to other City departments. Starting with the 2005-06 biennial budget, the City appropriated funding for public health services to the Human Services Department (HSD) and directed HSD to contract for public health services.
- **2005, New City position.** Also as part of the 2005-06 budget, the City created a new position in HSD—Public Health Manager and Policy Advisor—with the responsibilities of overseeing the City’s public health investments and contracts, developing public health policy, staffing the City Council members on the Board of Health, and serving as the primary liaison between the City and Public Health.
- **2006, City Policy Guide.** In 2006, the City adopted the Healthy Communities Initiative (HCI) Policy Guide, which guides the City’s public health investments and efforts. The guide recognizes that, “a strong regional health department is critical to the health and well being of Seattle’s people and communities... It is the City’s intention to help shape Public Health’s services and activities in Seattle.”
- **2006/2007, Appointment of the Public Health Director.** The 1996 Interlocal Agreement specifies that the Mayor of Seattle and the King County Executive jointly appoint the Director of Public Health and that both the City and County Councils must confirm the appointment. This process was followed in 2006/07 when Dr. David Fleming, the current Director, was appointed with the full participation of the Mayor. Only the County Executive can remove the Director, after consulting with the Seattle Mayor.
- **2008, King County Public Health Operational Master Plan (PHOMP).** In early 2008, the City endorsed the PHOMP, which was developed by the County and the Board of Health with City participation. The PHOMP is Public Health’s strategic plan outlining short- and long-term goals and strategies.