

TEAMING UP WITH PUBLIC HEALTH:

The Family Physician Public Health Partnership Guide

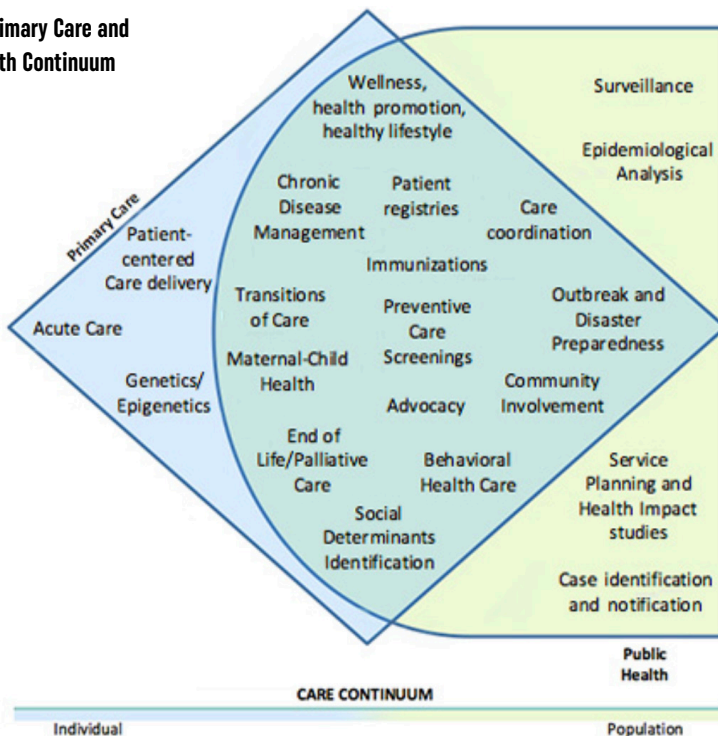
Introduction

The Family Physician Public Health Partnership Guide builds on the American Academy of Family Physician's Teaming Up with Public Health series, which was developed to empower family physicians to better integrate public health efforts into their practices and communities. A family physician's ability to maintain trusting relationships with patients across their lifespan provides a unique perspective on the communities and places where people live, learn, work and play. This clinical insight offers the opportunity to advance community health efforts by enabling family physicians to provide person-centered, team-based and community-aligned care to achieve better health, better care and lower costs.

At its best, primary care is integrated, accessible health services provided by physicians and their teams to address a majority of personal health needs and develop sustained relationships with patients to improve the health of families and communities. This is more achievable when primary care practices partner with organizations that share these same goals for their communities. This guide offers practical information for family physicians to help them understand and navigate the public health infrastructure so they can effectively collaborate and integrate with organizations at the federal and state levels and within their local communities.

One role of primary care is to improve the capacity to address health disparities and strengthen public health infrastructure along the care continuum, as illustrated in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. Primary Care and Public Health Continuum



From AAFP. *Integration of primary care and public health (position paper)*.
<https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/integration-primary-care.html>

Shared Language for Shared Work

Addressing patients' integrated care is a major function of primary care and a quality that family physicians are specifically trained and skilled at providing. Integrated care is also a goal among social services, public health, health care professionals, payers and health systems. Communication across sectors requires shared language. The following definitions are provided to orient family physicians to this evolving landscape of integrated care.

Public health is "the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities."¹

Whole health care "addresses the social and structural determinants at the root of poor health, focusing on the priorities and goals of people, families and communities...[and] centers on promoting resilience, preventing disease and restoring health."²

Whole-person health is the "physical, behavioral, spiritual and socioeconomic well-being as defined by individuals, families and communities...[and] is an interprofessional, team-based approach anchored in trusted relationships to promote well-being, prevent disease and restore health. It aligns with a person's life mission, aspiration and purpose."³

Patient-centered care is "integrated health care services delivered in a setting and manner that is responsive to individuals and their goals, values and preferences in a system that supports good provider-patient communication and empowers individuals receiving care and providers to make effective care plans together."⁴

Quality health care is "the achievement of optimal physical, mental and behavioral health outcomes through accessible, safe, cost-effective, equitable care that is based on best evidence, responsive to the needs and preferences of patients and populations and respectful of patients' families, personal values and beliefs."⁵

Family physicians are uniquely positioned to intervene across interpersonal, organizational and community-level health needs. Primary care activities, such as clinical preventive services, early diagnosis and intervention, quality-driven and evidence-based care, health promotion, chronic disease management and health advocacy, all work to improve individual and public health.⁶

Effective [collaboration and integration](#) among public health organizations and other community-based programs along the continuum in *Figure 1* supports and promotes long-term wellness via a cross-sectional approach to primary care where mental and behavioral health care services, social services and local public health organizations are integrated. Collaboration and integration in specific aspects of care can free up physicians' time and practice resources to enable them to address other aspects of delivering quality, patient-centered care.

Public Health Infrastructure

A strong public health infrastructure consists of up-to-date information systems, health professionals with cross-cutting and technical skills and public health organizations working together to promote the whole health of communities and advance health equity.^{7,8} Organizations in the sector operate at the federal, state and local levels, with funding at each level to develop and support initiatives that reduce preventable illnesses, diseases, deaths and health threats to communities.^{9,10}

Federal

Federal grants fund public health programs in states and communities, typically targeting specific issues or diseases. Federal funding for public health can come from any number of federal agencies, but primary sources of federal funding include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Health Resources and Services Administration.¹¹

State

Funding for public health at the state level varies based on states' tax structures, economic and health conditions and political priorities. States receive federal funds via block grants, which are then dispersed by the state to local agencies.^{9,12}

Local (publicly funded)

Federal funds are allocated to states based on the population size and health needs. State governments will distribute federal funds to local public organizations, such as local health departments, and may often add additional state funds to those allocations.

Municipalities often allocate portions of their budget specifically for public health initiatives, such as community health programs, environmental health efforts or resources for marginalized groups and communities facing health risks.^{8,9}

Local (privately funded)

Private funds for public health can be secured via crowdfunding and/or community donations, which are often specific to innovative projects or needs.

Philanthropic organizations often support public health initiatives that align with their missions. Various public health organizations may apply for funding from these groups to support research grants, program funding and capacity building.

Businesses may provide sponsorships to support community health initiatives and events or raise awareness about campaigns or programs that align with corporate social responsibility goals.

Public Health Programs: Community Engagement and Integration

Connecting public health goals to community resources can support areas of patient care that are typically challenging for primary care to handle on its own, such as disease prevention, health promotion and chronic disease management. When primary care physicians connect their patients to other community resources, they build partnerships and integrate whole-person health into their care plans. The programs, resources and services at the national, state and local levels listed below can assist physicians in better understanding their patient populations and lead to a higher level of community engagement and health equity.

National Programs

The [Community Preventive Services Task Force](#) works to improve the health of communities by issuing evidence-based recommendations and findings on public health interventions designed to improve health and safety.

[County Health Rankings & Roadmaps](#) provides data, evidence, guidance and examples to build awareness of the multiple factors influencing health and support leaders in growing community power to improve health equity.

[Food Is Medicine Coalition™](#) is an association of non-profit, medically tailored food and nutrition service providers.

The [USDA Food Assistance Program](#) consists of 16 federal nutrition programs, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, National School Lunch Program and Farmers Market Nutrition Program.

The [Office of Community Services](#) partners with states, territories, tribes and community agencies to eliminate the causes and consequences of poverty, increase the self-sufficiency of individuals and families and revitalize communities.

The AAFP provides the [Neighborhood Navigator](#), an interactive tool connecting patients to community resources and neighborhood programs. With more than 40,000 social services listed by ZIP code, patients can find local services related to health care, mental health, food and housing.

State Programs

[Health and environmental agencies of U.S. states and territories](#) work to protect and improve the health and environment by providing the following services:

- Licensing hospitals and care facilities
- Monitoring air quality
- Operating state Medicaid programs
- Health promotion and prevention services, such as:
 - Cancer screenings
 - [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#)
 - WIC
 - SNAP

[State rural health associations](#) are represented in 44 states to provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communication, education and research.

Local Programs

Every community is unique and offers different resources, but not all resources exist in every community. Community-based organizations are often specific to the area they serve. They have various funding streams and may be private, non-profit or federally funded and can include:

- State/county extension offices
- Veteran organizations
- Local public health departments
- Homeless shelters
- Libraries
- Religious organizations

AAFP Resources

[Integration of Primary Care and Public Health \(position paper\)](#)

[Community Collaboration Resources](#)

[The EveryONE Project Toolkit](#)

[Implicit Bias Resources](#)

[Social Needs Guide](#)

[Health Equity for EveryONE CME – Part 1](#)

[Health Equity for EveryONE CME – Part 2](#)

[Social Determinants of Health Audiobook](#)

IRIS: A Community Engagement and Integration Example

The [Integrated Referral and Intake System](#) is a web-based, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act-compliant, bi-directional and closed-loop referral system designed to support communication among community organizations/providers and families/individuals in need of social and health-based services.¹³ By evaluating referral data, organizations can better assess the allocation of community resources.

Funding for IRIS comes from various sources, primarily at the local community level and varies from community to community. Sources for funding can range from community partner investments, local grants, community initiatives and/or health departments. This referral system is currently used by communities in Kansas, Illinois, Utah, Missouri, Iowa and the Boston area to increase community capacity through strengthened collaboration.



“Through our IRIS network, I was able to connect a client with a car seat program. At the time, we didn’t have car seats available in Clay County, but I was able to work with the other members on our local leadership team and refer the client to a program in a nearby town.”

— NIKKI BURWELL, PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE,
CLAY COUNTY KANSAS HEALTH DEPARTMENT¹⁴

Summary

Family physicians are well-positioned to reinforce public health initiatives and serve as influential stakeholders to advocate for their communities’ policies, systems and environmental improvements. Family medicine practices that cultivate and leverage public health partnerships can better understand and address patient needs, improve the quality of care, respond to community health issues and advocate for community health improvements. As a trusted source of reliable health information, family physicians have the unique opportunity to connect their patients to valuable community resources that address whole-person health.

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