



Definitions in Public Health

Building a shared language across public health

Sometimes we find ourselves talking at cross purposes within public health – no wonder we find it so hard to have our public health voice heard!

Sometimes when we talk about public health we mean “a healthy public, where all peoples have good health”

Other times we mean “public health services funded through District Health Boards (DHBs)”, or “public health skills and approaches” such as the way epidemiology looks at the impact of changes on communities, and looks at the differences between different communities.

And sometimes we are so busy with the needs of our communities we don’t catch up with the language of our colleagues, who are also working in public health.

This pamphlet is a start to having a shared language about public health here in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Building the conditions in which people can be healthy

The following **essential public health functions** need to be performed for a healthy society.

- Health situation monitoring and analysis;
- Epidemiological surveillance/ disease prevention and control;
- Development of policies and planning in public health;
- Strategic management of health systems and services for population health gain;
- Regulation and enforcement to protect public health;
- Human resource development and planning in public health;
- Health promotion, social participation and empowerment;
- Ensuring the quality of personal and population-based health services;
- Research, development and implementation of innovative public health solutions.

The public health workforce

People in all variety of organisations – within government, private and voluntary organisations, and individuals work to prevent disease and promote health.

Most public health workers are based in health organisations that concentrate on public health, such as specialist units in District Health Boards, iwi providers or specialist laboratory services.

Many people working in public health outcomes are not employed in the health sector at all, but work for local or regional government, Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC), or Occupational safety and Health (OSH).

Some people doing essential public health functions are based completely outside the health sector e.g. police, customs. They are working to achieve the outcomes of public health, but no-one thinks of the fire service as public health workers but they certainly save lives!

What skills do we use in public health work?

The **practices of public health** are to:

- advocate
- analyse
- assess
- communicate
- contribute to the learning of others
- develop plans
- ensure compliance with regulations
- evaluate
- facilitate
- implement
- integrate
- investigate
- manage
- negotiate
- set priorities
- use evidence
- work with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Other terms

Publicly funded health services:

- those that are paid for, in part, or in whole, through taxation.

Publicly owned health services:

- owned by the (local or central) government on behalf of the people.

What's public health about?

The public health mission:

- to make sure the conditions exist for people to be healthy.

Public health substance:

- organised community effort aimed at the prevention of disease and the promotion of health.

Public health outcomes:

- Raised health status and quality of life
- Reduced health inequalities
- Increased safeguards for the health of the public
- Reduced numbers of people with acute or chronic disease or disability.

Public health and health promotion

Health promotion is one set of public health skills and approaches. Health promotion aims to enable people to increase control over, and to improve, their health.

Public health services

Most public health services are preventive services aimed at whole populations or communities of people. Some personal preventive or treatment services are also part of public health services, such as aspects of health education, immunisation or screening, treatment of refugees for infectious diseases.

Some services are very specific:

- falls prevention for the frail elderly,
- immunisation programmes
- drinking water safety.

Other services, such as community development, are very broad and can address such issues as the role of poverty in ill health.

Personal health services

Personal health services (hospitals, GPs and the like working with individual people) contribute to the outcomes of public health. Personal health treatment services make contributions to improving the quality of life as well as saving lives through services such as screening and immunisation, maternity and emergency services.