

# Creating a Local Board of Health

How communities benefit from their own health officers

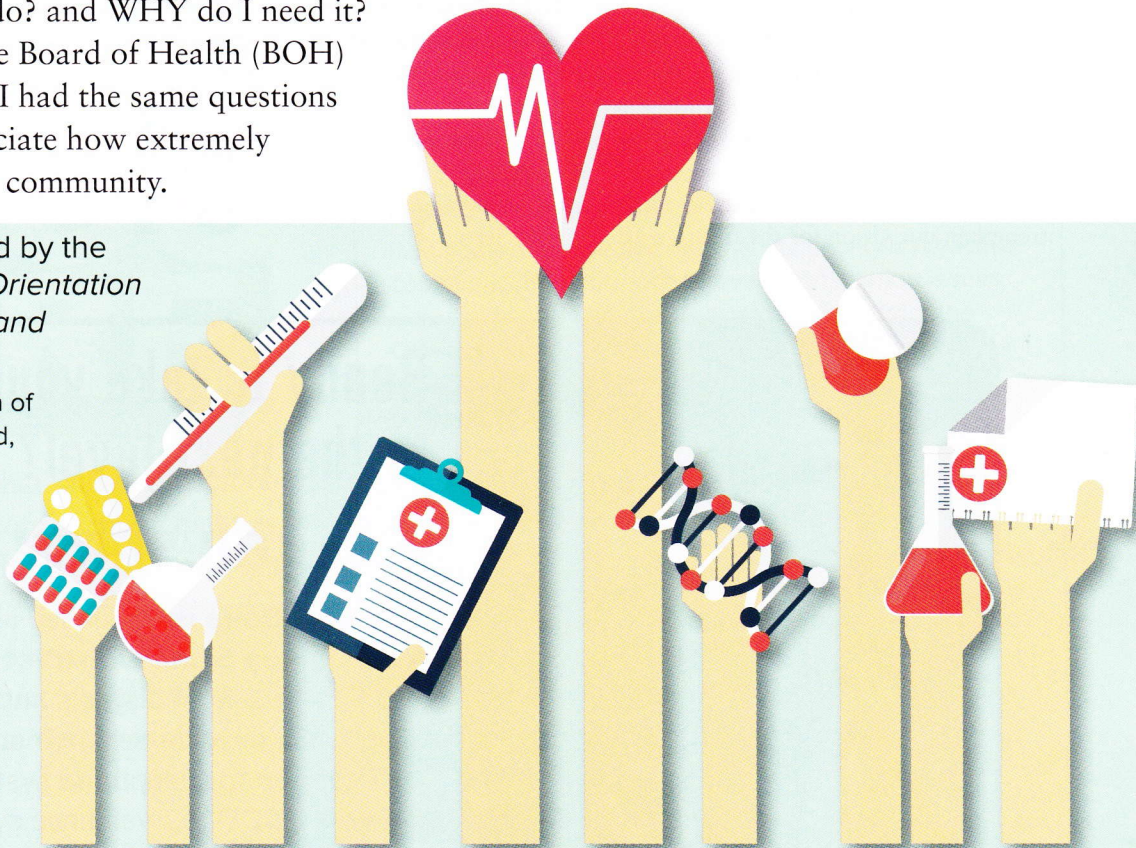
By Christine Harris, President, NJ Local Boards of Health Association

**M**any individuals have expressed an interest in creating a local board of health for their communities and invariably ask several fundamental questions: WHAT is a board of health? WHAT does it do? and WHY do I need it?

When first appointed to the Board of Health (BOH) in the City of East Orange I had the same questions and quickly came to appreciate how extremely important a BOH is to our community.

In a capsule and as defined by the *Board of Health Member Orientation Manual, A Guide to Roles and Responsibilities*:

“A board of health is a collection of individuals, appointed or elected, whose authority is derived from state and local statute, and is responsible for coordinating public health activities at the municipal and county levels. As such, boards of health are an integral part of protecting, improving and promoting the health of residents within the community. It is also a primary proponent of funding for public health.”



## Firsthand knowledge

Local boards of health (LBH) members are residents in the community they serve. They are individuals who understand the importance of personal and environmental “health” and they understand how disease and pollutants negatively affect one’s health and environment. As residents of the community, they acquire firsthand knowledge of their communities’ needs and concerns, and, as LBH members have the authority to address them.

LBH members are engaged in their communities and because health officers are licensed by the State of New Jersey and have enforcement authority, they have the power to achieve change at a local level. The LBH also have a critical role of ensuring community safety during emergencies where the impact of their decisions is immediate.

The type and structure of the board of health for your community is determined by the form of government in which your municipality is developed. However, regardless of the type of board you

# Meeting Basics

**Procedurally, Board of Health meetings are generally held monthly, however, smaller communities meet less frequently, or quarterly.**

The frequency of your meetings is determined by the size of your community and its needs. All Board of Health meetings must conform to the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975. Public notification of the meeting is required and achieved via newspaper publication and posting on bulletin boards. Meeting agenda must be created, and minutes generated with subsequent board approval. Meetings are held after a member quorum is confirmed. Also, present is the health officer and legal counsel. The board president and vice president are elected annually by its members.

The public can attend Board of Health meetings and present their concerns or just observe. The health officer will report on the health department's activities and discuss issues and new interests. The Health and Human Services Director is also present. Invitations can be extended to any department manager or supervisor within the health department. Municipal managers and supervisors may be invited to contribute to public health discussions and/or to engage in establishing interdepartmental cooperation under the umbrella of "health in all policies."

create, the boards core functions of assessments, assurance, and policy development, transcend across all board forms and variations. Implementation of the board's core functions manifest themselves through administration, program planning, evaluating health department effectiveness, financial stewardship, and representing the public interest.

## Board membership

Board members are expected to understand health issues and factors that influence population health, attend meetings, participate in creating the Community Health Improvement Plan, assist in the health department's public health accreditation process, and much more. They participate in improving the health of their communities, administratively, in the provision of health services such as immunizations, health education, lead detection and remediation, physical examinations, disease screening, STD detection and treatment, HIV testing and consulting, vital statistics, animal welfare, disseminating information

to the community, advocating to municipal leadership for funding and more.

## Supporting your department

At the state association level, you can present your specific interests to your New Jersey Local Boards of Health Association (NJLBHA), who can assist you in finding solutions to local concerns. You can also suggest one of your members participate on the executive board of NJLBHA.

Finally, and equally important, is your community engagement, commitment, and volunteerism. You volunteer your expertise and time in service to improve the lives of your fellow citizens while promoting healthy public policy and strengthening your community. It is personally rewarding and affords you the opportunity to engage with other like-minded volunteers and professionals in one common goal: improving population health. ♣

@ For assistance and additional information, please contact either your local health office or the NJLBHA directly at [president@njlbha.org](mailto:president@njlbha.org) or visit [www.njlbha.org](http://www.njlbha.org) and review our quarterly newsletter.

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**T.M. FITZGERALD & ASSOCIATES**

850 WEST CHESTER PIKE, SUITE 200 HAVERTOWN, PA 19083-4442  
Toll Free: 888-795-0660 • Direct: 610-853-2008 • Fax: 610-789-5168  
Visit Us Online: [www.tmfitzgerald.com](http://www.tmfitzgerald.com)