

# Connecticut Department of Public Health Strategic Plan



**2013–2018**



## Connecticut Department of Public Health

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# Message from the Commissioner

I am pleased to present to you, the Connecticut Department of Public Health's five year strategic plan for 2013-2018. This is an important initiative that establishes a unified vision for the agency's future and the shared work ahead.

This initiative began with a dialogue between agency personnel and key partners about our past performance, emerging issues, and the significant challenges in improving population health that we face moving forward. The result is a statement of prioritized goals and initial objectives and strategies that will better position the agency toward our vision of *Healthy People in Healthy Connecticut Communities*. These goals are as follows: Ensuring Programmatic Excellence; Promoting the Value and Contributions of Public Health; Building Strategic Partnerships to Improve the Public Health System; Fostering and Maintaining a Competent, Empowered Workforce; Establishing a Sustainable, Customer-Oriented Organization; and Championing Health Equity.

In this plan you will notice a focus on people: our workforce, our partners and stakeholders, and our customers - the residents of Connecticut. You will also notice a focus on health equity as a key principle in improving health and health outcomes in our state. Lastly, you will notice a focus on improving our performance- where we measure our progress, learn from our past efforts, and use data to make informed decisions about our future direction.

This plan is the first step in an ongoing strategic planning process and our goals, objectives and strategies will continue to evolve through annual evaluation and adjustment. Every part of the agency will be engaged in this work, and I invite you to join with us as we work toward meeting the many public health challenges ahead.

Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA  
Commissioner



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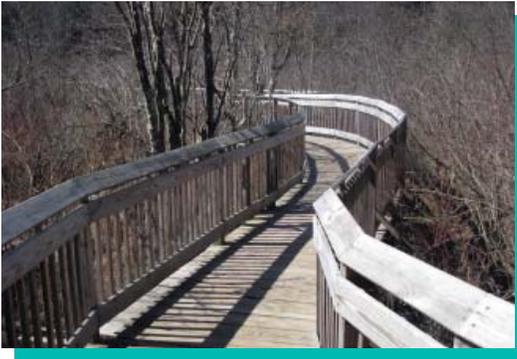
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# Purpose of the Plan

## What is a strategic plan?

In general terms, a strategic plan is intended to provide guidance to an organization as it moves forward in order to carry out its mission, and ultimately achieve its vision.

The *Connecticut Department of Public Health's Strategic Plan* sets the direction for the organization for the next five years.



In developing our strategic plan, we looked at what we were doing, figured out what we should be doing, and developed a plan for getting there.

- **This plan is designed to be realized over a five year period.** Not all of the suggested strategies will be able to be accomplished in the first years of the plan. Given the state's constrained resources and the aspirational nature of many of the goals and objectives, we will have to prioritize among the various strategies. Our ability to fully implement this plan will be impacted by factors including mandated services, existing funding levels, and other fiscal requirements. By sharing this plan, we seek to share our priorities and plan of action which we are committed to implementing to the best of our ability.

## Why is the plan important?

A strategic plan provides guidance for all employees and our partners to make decisions that further the goals of the organization. It can be likened to a road map to get from the organization's current position, to where the organization would like to be.

## How will it be used?

By laying out our priorities for protecting and improving the health of the people of Connecticut, we seek to provide leadership, inform our residents, and align our efforts with those of our partners.



### *For the public, this plan is meant to*

- Communicate the agency's vision and show our intended direction and emphasis over the next five years
- Share our values and priorities
- Affirm our commitment to promoting health equity for all people
- Serve as baseline to show progress and allow you to hold us accountable for our actions

### *For our partners including municipalities, towns, local health agencies, community organizations, and businesses, this plan is additionally meant to:*

- Reflect our commitment to working with you as partners in helping to achieve community goals

### *For health department staff, the plan is additionally meant to:*

- Align department employees, services and programs with high-level goals
- Inform policy, operational, and budget decisions
- Provide a structure to ensure oversight and management of programs and services

## The Department of Public Health...

### *Ensures a safe and healthy environment by:*

- Identifying and responding to potential health hazards in the environment caused by harmful substances such as lead, radon, and asbestos
- Ensuring adequate and quality drinking water, and safe public swimming areas
- Identifying possible cancer clusters and their causes, and
- Providing assessments for hazardous waste sites and conducting risk communication and education about potential environmental risks near sites.

### *Promotes good health and prevents injury and disability by:*

- Promoting healthy communities and environments through programs like the Community Transformation Grants.
- Providing education, information, and services to help people make healthy choices
- Supporting prevention programs that address tobacco use, injury, chronic disease, and other issues, and
- Protecting the health of mothers and children through health screening and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program.

### *Prevents the spread of disease by:*

- Promoting immunizations through public health awareness and supporting immunization clinics
- Detecting and investigating disease outbreaks
- Monitoring of emerging health threats, and responding to and preparing for public health emergencies, and
- Providing laboratory services to detect health problems.

Established in 1878, the Department of Public Health (DPH) is the lead agency in protection of the public's health, and in providing health information, policy and advocacy.

DPH is a central part of a comprehensive network of public health services, and is a partner to local health departments for which it provides advocacy, training and certification, technical assistance and consultation, and specialty services that are not available at the local level.

The agency is responsible for providing accurate health information to the Governor, the Legislature, the federal government and local communities. This information is used to monitor the health status of Connecticut's residents, set health priorities and evaluate the effectiveness of health initiatives. The agency is also a regulator focused on health outcomes, maintaining a balance between assuring quality and administrative burden on the personnel, facilities and programs regulated.

DPH is currently staffed by approximately 800 employees organized into fourteen branches, sections, and offices; each tasked with ensuring and/or providing services to help the agency achieve its mission.

## Agency Organization

**Administration Branch** assures that administrative activities (i.e., contract and grants management, fiscal services, human resources, informatics and facilities management) are coordinated and accomplished in an effective and efficient manner.

**Affirmative Action Office** is responsible for ensuring that the department guarantees equal opportunity for all individuals.

**Agency Legal Office** is responsible for overseeing legal activities and providing legal support to the agency.

**Communications Office** provides communication activities that serve the agency and its stakeholders including public information, freedom of information, media and community relations, and marketing communications.

**Community Health and Prevention Section** promotes healthy behaviors and lifestyles by establishing opportunities that support healthy eating and active living through education, early detection and by integrating chronic disease prevention efforts to improve overall population health, including vulnerable groups; and conducts surveillance to inform policy makers and the public.

**Family Health Section** administers and oversees services primarily intended to impact the health and well-being of all members of the family especially mothers and children, including children with special health care needs.

**Healthcare Quality & Safety Branch** ensures a competent health care workforce, provides regulatory oversight of health care facilities and services, and administers and enforces emergency medical services.

**Infectious Disease Section** collects data to assess infectious disease and associated risk factors, identifies and responds to emerging infections and conducts outbreak investigations and surveillance.

**Office of Health Care Access** promotes appropriate health facility and service development that addresses a public need, gathers and analyzes hospital financial, billing and discharge data, and assists consumers with hospital billing and other hospital concerns.

**Population Health Statistics & Surveillance Section** maintains statewide vital records and tumor registries, and analyzes and interprets health information.

**Public Health Laboratory** analyzes clinical specimens and environmental samples submitted by federal and state agencies, local health departments, clinical laboratories, health care providers, and water utilities.

**Public Health Preparedness and Response** plans for and responds to public health emergencies.

**Public Health Systems Improvement** works to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public health programs and services.

**Regulatory Services Branch** has regulatory oversight of the state's drinking water systems, child day care facilities, youth camps and environmental health services.



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for not  
smoking!



# Strategic Planning Process

A strategic plan serves as a road map for all employees and our partners to make decisions that further the goals of the organization. To ensure that our plan meets the needs of the people of Connecticut, we are engaged in a comprehensive, participatory strategic planning process that includes our staff, partners, and the public in identifying needs and setting priorities.

## Community Members

The first step in our planning process is to understand the health needs of the people of Connecticut. Health data are analyzed and community members provide input to the *State Health Assessment* through key informant interviews, advisory groups, Coalition meetings, and public forums. The assessment will document health risks and factors contributing to poor health.

## Department Programs and Partners

Findings of the health assessment are used to set priorities for health improvement. The *State Health Improvement Plan* aligns the activities of the health department and our partners with our health improvement goals. We ask our partners from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors across Connecticut to identify successful strategies for promoting health. These partners include State, Tribal, and local health agencies; hospitals and other providers of medical, dental, and behavioral health care; community and professional organizations and coalitions; businesses, community service providers and representatives of vulnerable populations; academic institutions; and complementary service providers.

## Department Leadership

The Strategic Plan describes how the health department will achieve health improvement goals and implement strategies laid out in the improvement plan. A day-long retreat was conducted with management and staff to review and identify organizational strategic priorities. Work groups composed of DPH staff developed workplans and the plan will be continually revisited to ensure alignment or to make necessary adjustments.

# Vision, Mission and Values

Our vision, mission, and values guide us in setting priorities by articulating our goal for the future, what we can do to achieve that goal and how we will conduct ourselves in pursuing our goal.

## Our Vision

**Healthy People in Healthy Connecticut Communities.**

## Our Mission

**To protect and improve the health and safety of the people of Connecticut by:**

- Assuring the conditions in which people can be healthy;
- Preventing disease, injury, and disability; and
- Promoting the equal enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, which is a human right and a priority of the state.

## Our Values

<b>Performance-based</b>	We learn from our past efforts and use performance measures and data to focus our future efforts.
<b>Equitable</b>	We foster policies and programs that promote fairness, social justice, equity, and cultural competence.
<b>Professional</b>	We respect and uphold the high standards, skills, competence, and integrity of our professions.
<b>Collaborative</b>	We work together and with others who share a similar vision for the mutual benefit of the community.
<b>Accountable</b>	We are responsive and transparent to the public in our actions and communications.
<b>Innovative</b>	We are creative and seek out new ways to solve problems.
<b>Service-oriented</b>	We respect, listen, and respond to our customers

## Principle of Health Equity

In passing Public Act No. 08-171, the General Assembly finds that **“equal enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a human right and a priority of the state”**. It understood that barriers exist to the equal enjoyment of good health and that efforts must be directed at developing and implementing policy solutions that eliminate disparities in health status based on race, ethnicity and linguistic ability to improve the quality of health for all state residents. The Connecticut Department of Public Health also recognizes other priority populations in its efforts to address health disparities, which in addition to race, ethnicity, and language, may be based on age, gender, socioeconomic position, immigrant status, sexual minority status, disability, homelessness, mental illness, and geographic area of residence.

# Opportunities and Challenges

## Internal Opportunities and Challenges

The Connecticut Department of Public Health is proud of our success in protecting and improving the health and safety of the people of Connecticut. We attribute part of this success to...

**Expert and accessible leadership** Our organization is led by knowledgeable and committed public health professionals who are dedicated to protecting and improving the health of the people of Connecticut. Through our planning efforts, the leadership ensures that all health department staff are reminded of our ultimate vision and align their individual efforts and programs towards fulfilment of the organization's mission. Our strong departmental focus and leadership ensures that we are accountable to the needs of our constituents.



**Credibility as a recognized resource** We strive to be a performance-based organization. We seek to set measurable goals and track our progress to ensure that our actions are achieving their intended results. We know that what gets measured gets done. We successfully serve the public as long as we continuously work towards a common vision of *Healthy People in Healthy Connecticut Communities*.

**Strong partnerships** Complex problems require a multi-dimensional approach. We know that we cannot achieve our vision without the support and assistance of our public and private partners at the local, state and national levels. We share our success in promoting and protecting the public's health with our many partners. Our partners advise us, collaborate with us in providing services, and hold us accountable.

**State of the art public health laboratory** Our ability to identify and respond quickly to health threats requires that we maintain a high level of technological readiness and capability. Substantial investments in our Public Health Laboratory allow us to meet new requirements for disease testing and reporting. As a result, our laboratory infrastructure ranks among the top ten in the country.



While we have much to be proud of, we know we can improve. To be an effective organization we must address these challenges.

**Bureaucracy** Like many large organizations, we struggle with a system of administration which is defined by hierarchy, division of labor, and rules, regulations and procedures which are often cumbersome and inflexible. We know our bureaucracy inhibits innovation and is a barrier to customer service. We are committed to making structural and operational changes to fulfill our organizational values.



**Inefficient Internal Systems** While we continue to make strides in introducing new technologies to support more efficient and effective operations, our internal systems do not consistently expedite our work or support our organizational objectives. We must devise new ways to get our work done efficiently through use of new technologies and improved coordination and communications.

**Siloed Resources and Programs** Although we value coordination and collaboration, our many lines of business are often directed by external funders with rigid guidelines and requirements which can get in the way of true integration. To achieve real synergies across our various activities, we must be innovative. We are committed to promoting a culture of customer oriented service which requires that we eliminate duplication and find ways of operating our programs in a holistic and coordinated way.



**Limited state funding/resources** Connecticut's reliance on federal funding for public health has a down side. While we are successful in maximizing federal dollars to support our health improvement efforts, our priorities are effectively federal priorities rather than state priorities. To the extent to which our priorities align, we benefit. When our priorities do not align, we are unable to address issues which are unique to the people of Connecticut. While we are bound to the priorities driven by our current funding, we strive to fund state priorities which are not currently covered.



## External Opportunities and Challenges

We don't operate in a vacuum. As an organization that both serves and operates in coordination with the public, we must be responsive to an ever changing environment and accountable to those we serve, considering at all times the need to....

**Increase public awareness and understanding of the role of our department** Many people do not understand public health or the role that it plays in their lives. Public health is all around us; it is in the media campaigns urging us to eat healthy foods or to stop smoking, the development of walkable paths in our communities, the provision of immunization clinics, the monitoring of disease outbreaks, the safe drinking water that we have access to every day, and in the assurance of a safe and competent health care workforce. These things, among numerous others, are all part of an effort to prevent disease, promote good health, and ensure a safe and healthy environment. Our success is measured by the absence of poor health and negative outcomes; in short, when we are successful, we are invisible. Highlighting the invisible is a challenge, but in order to prove our value, as well as reach those residents in greatest need, it is important that we increase efforts to educate the public about the role of our department.



**Respond to new and emergent public health issues** Our ability to protect the public's health requires that we identify and respond quickly to new public health challenges. In recent years, we have faced increasingly complex and diverse threats of natural and human origin. Our population is increasingly diverse and aged; we are experiencing increases in chronic diseases and obesity; and our growing population stresses the quality of our air, water, and lands. We have responded to public health emergencies caused by terrorist threats, infectious disease outbreaks, contaminated food products, and

natural disasters. In the face of these challenges and threats, we continuously work to improve our response effectiveness. We act with urgency when faced with a public health emergency while proactively assessing risks and mitigating against future threats.

**Adapt to system changes under Health Care Reform** The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act presents challenges and opportunities for our health department and for the field of public health. The legislation provides for additional funding for public health workforce training, new mandates for the coverage of preventive services, and expanded access to health care coverage. In order to adapt and respond to impending changes, it is critical that we remain informed and that we continue to be involved in the dialogue on health care reform and its implementation.



## Respond to increasing demands in times of fiscal constraints

Like many organizations, the health department is being expected to do more with less. In response, we must find innovative ways to deliver services that are cost-effective and efficient and that meet the needs of those we serve. It is important that we employ best practices to assure limited resources achieve the desired outcomes, and we must collaborate with partners to create integrated approaches to achieving community health.



## Utilize new technologies to better communicate with partners and the public

In our rapidly changing technological environment, it can be difficult to keep up with advances. There are many new channels that can be used for two-way, immediate and wide-spread communications. New media like Twitter, Facebook, blogs, reverse 911, and websites can reach our partners and the public where they live, work, and play in real time and with targeted information. Our ability to reach out to and receive information from a widespread audience is literally at our fingertips. It is critical that we remain current and that we understand how to best use each tool to effectively communicate and engage with partners and the public.



# Priorities and Strategies

The Connecticut Department of Public Health has established six goals to direct our efforts over the next five years. Our priorities were identified through a comprehensive assessment of our opportunities and challenges and reflect the broad input of our many partners, staff and the public. Through addressing these priority areas, we will make progress towards our ultimate vision of **Healthy People in Healthy Connecticut Communities**.

Our six priority areas are briefly described below. Our plan for action including how we will know if we are successful is detailed in the following pages. We commit to...

## **Ensuring Programmatic Excellence** *by creating a culture of continuous quality improvement which aligns the health needs of the public with the actions of the health department.*

We begin by understanding the health needs of the public and engaging our staff, partners and the public in targeting priority needs for improvement. We use data to continuously monitor progress towards our health improvement goals. This process provides information for ongoing improvement of health department processes, procedures, and programs, enhances our effectiveness to provide public health services, and increases our capacity to meet the health needs of the people of Connecticut. We are committed to continuous learning about the public's needs, timely response to changes in the environment, and effective application of new, innovative and evidence-based interventions to public health problems.

## **Promoting the Value and Contributions of Public Health** *by educating the public about the role public health plays in increasing the number of Americans who are healthy at every stage of life.*

As the nation continues to seek cost-effective strategies for improving overall health status and reducing health care costs, public health's population based approach to protecting and promoting health is key. In the past 100 years, life expectancy of Americans has increased 30 years of which 25 are attributed to public health initiatives and only four are due to medical advances. To continue to achieve increases in healthy years of life, we require sufficient, stable and sustainable funding for our services.

### Top 10 Achievements in Public Health



1. Vaccination
2. Motor-vehicle safety
3. Safer workplaces
4. Control of infectious diseases
5. Decline in deaths from coronary heart disease and stroke
6. Safer and healthier foods
7. Healthier mothers and babies
8. Family planning
9. Fluoridation of drinking water
10. Recognition of tobacco use as a health hazard

<http://www.whatispublichealth.org/impact/achievements.html>, adapted from CDC's MMWR page

**Building Strategic Partnerships to Improve the Public Health System** *by seeking input and increasing collaborative efforts.*

We know we can only be successful in overcoming the challenges we face by working together. We will continue to build and engage strategic partnerships to identify and solve problems. Together we can develop mutually beneficial actions and policies.



**Fostering and Maintaining a Competent, Empowered Workforce** *by providing opportunities for continuous skill building in a safe and healthy environment.*

We value our employees and seek to provide them with additional opportunities to upgrade skills, appropriate resources and work environment to enable them to be efficient, effective and productive.

**Establishing a Sustainable, Customer-Oriented Organization** *by increasing access to our services, personnel, and information.*

We will be responsive to our customers’ needs by improving our business practices to be more efficient and effective, promoting improved communications with our customers, and making data available to support health planning and resource targeting.

**Championing Health Equity** *by making a concerted effort to address the many social determinants that impact one’s ability to be healthy.*

Health equity is recognized by the state as not only a priority, but as a human right. *Healthy People 2020* defines health equity as the “attainment of the highest level of health for all people.” In more practical terms, we believe that all people deserve access to clean public drinking water, safe and healthy places for children to grow, and healthy homes and environments. Guaranteeing that these needs are met will help us to ensure optimum health for the most vulnerable among us. In order to achieve health equity, we must understand and address the root causes that create the unfair and avoidable differences in health status that exist within our state’s population. A broad approach will be needed to address the many societal factors contributing to disparities – both historical and contemporary – including, but not limited to, income, employment status, disability, housing, residential segregation, language, sexism, and racism.



# Goal 1:

## Ensure programmatic excellence.

### Objective 1: Identify the health and safety needs of the residents of Connecticut.



#### Strategies

- a. Develop an inventory of public health indicators.
- b. Seek input from key informants, stakeholders, and partners to identify health issues of residents.
- c. Analyze and compile input to produce a *State Health Assessment Report* that identifies the health status of Connecticut's population.

### Objective 2: Identify strategies for improving the health of Connecticut residents.



#### Strategies

- a. Engage the community and encourage input in the development of a *State Health Improvement Plan*.
- b. Prioritize areas for improving the health of Connecticut's population.
- c. Prepare a *State Health Improvement Plan* detailing actions to be taken by the DPH in response to identified needs.

### Objective 3: Align state resources with priority health improvement needs.

#### Strategies

- a. Analyze current allocations and use of resources.
- b. Seek new resources to support priority programming based on resource analysis and current needs.
- c. Align available resources with prioritized strategies for health improvement.

### Objective 4: Implement strategies prioritized in *State Health Improvement Plan*.

#### Strategies

- a. Make DPH staff and programs accountable for implementing the *State Health Improvement Plan*.
- b. Ensure that strategies are implemented using evidence-based and best practices as available.

### Objective 5: Continuously monitor and improve program implementation.

#### Strategies

- a. Develop metrics for assessing the degree to which services are impacting the health of the community as intended.
- b. Monitor and adjust services as needed to better meet identified needs.
- c. Repeat assessment and adjustment process on a yearly basis.

## Goal 2:

# Promote the value and contribution of public health.

**Objective 1: Develop a communication strategy to raise awareness of the impact of public health efforts.**



### Strategies

- a. Identify our audiences to include the public, legislators, and partners.
- b. Identify consistent messaging to define public health and its impact on the state.
- c. Identify plan for dissemination of messaging.

**Objective 2: Communicate public health messaging to key stakeholders.**



### Strategies

- a. Build internal social marketing capacity.
- b. Use media outlets, newsletters, and social media to communicate public health messages.
- c. Conduct annual legislative briefing.

**Objective 3: Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategy.**

### Strategies

- a. Establish baseline data for evaluation.
- b. Use metrics to assess awareness of and support for Public Health agenda.
- c. Make adjustments to messaging as needed based on assessment findings.



## Goal 3:

# Build strategic partnerships to improve the public health system.

**Objective 1: Expand opportunities to seek input, listen, and respond to partners.**



### Strategies

- a. Identify existing partners and potential partners for recruitment.
- b. Develop a strategy for virtual and in-person communication with partners.
- c. Engage in consistent and open communication with partners.

**Objective 2: Empower partners to play an active role in shaping the public health agenda.**

### Strategies

- a. Create a partner tool-kit with resources related to evidenced based best practice for staff and collaborating partners to draw from.
- b. Utilize partner relationships as a collaborative for continued learning and movement toward service improvement.



## Goal 4:

# Foster and maintain a competent, empowered workforce.

### Objective 1: Promote the health and well-being of the public health workforce.



#### Strategies

- a. Provide a safe and healthy work environment.
- b. Promote wellness and work/life balance initiatives, policies and programs that contribute to an increase in healthy hours worked.

### Objective 2: Develop skills to meet the changing needs of public health.



#### Strategies

- a. Assess training needs of our current public health workforce.
- b. Identify existing training resources which can be utilized to address needs.
- c. Develop an agency-wide training program that promotes skill building and cross-training.
- d. Implement training and development programs available to all employees to help achieve agency goals.

### Objective 3: Build capacity to meet the public health workforce needs for the future.

#### Strategies

- a. Provide supervisory and leadership training to encourage continuous professional development.
- b. Provide internship opportunities for students and others to encourage development of practical skills and career opportunities.
- c. Develop an onboarding program for new hires to the agency.



## Goal 5:

### Establish a sustainable, customer-oriented organization.



#### Objective 1: Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of department programs, services and systems.

##### Strategies

- a. Promote a culture of customer service among staff.
- b. Adopt new technologies and processes that allow programs to serve customers more effectively and efficiently.

#### Objective 2: Increase access to department services, personnel, and information.

##### Strategies

- a. Create a website that is easy to navigate and that facilitates access to needed information.
- b. Utilize new media as well as more traditional communication tools to raise awareness about the services available to residents.
- c. Ensure that services are offered at convenient times in order to improve accessibility.



#### Objective 3: Increase satisfaction of department services among residents of Connecticut.

##### Strategies

- a. Define our customers.
- b. Make customer service a primary focus for all employees.
- c. Gather customer feedback regarding service delivery and report results.



## Goal 6:

### Champion health equity.



**Objective 1: Promote a culture that embraces the principles of health equity.**

#### Strategies

- a. Achieve consensus on the constructs of health equity.
- b. Educate staff about health equity and the social determinants of health.
- c. Ensure that health equity is a priority that is incorporated in programming.

**Objective 2: Assess the impact of our programs in addressing the disparities that exist within our state and adjust services as needed.**

#### Strategies

- a. Identify available sources of health equity data.
- b. Analyze data to evaluate impact of programming on disparities (to assess the degree to which programs are addressing disparities).
- c. Make adjustments to programming based on analysis and research of best practices.



Office of the Commissioner

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Schedule of Revisions:

Version x.x                    Date:

Version x.x                    Date:

Version x.x                    Date:

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