West Virginia Association
of Local Health Departments
Promote. Prevent. Protect.

Local Health Departments: Protecting Communities. Strengthening West Virginia.
West Virginia's local health departments are the backbone of community safety and public health. While hospitals focus on treating individuals who are already sick or injured, health departments work at the community level to prevent illness before it starts; protecting families, improving access to care, strengthening local economies, and delivering measurable results through innovation, collaboration, and data-driven strategies across the state.

Local health departments:

- Prevent outbreaks and reduce hospitalizations
- Improve health equity for rural and underserved populations
- Save taxpayer dollars through prevention
- Strengthen emergency preparedness and response
- Support workforce participation and economic stability

Local Health Departments are VITAL to West Virginia

Enforcement

Health departments have the legal authority to enforce public health and safety standards that individuals cannot monitor on their own, protecting communities by ensuring food safety through restaurant and grocery inspections, securing clean drinking water by testing water sources and regulating sewage and septic systems, and controlling public health nuisances such as trash accumulation and animal-related threats like rabies.

Surveillance

Local health departments are the first line of defense when disease begins to spread, rapidly identifying patterns and investigating early cases, stopping outbreaks at three cases instead of allowing them to escalate into hundreds.

Safety

In many rural West Virginia counties, local health departments are a critical lifeline—providing essential services like WIC nutrition support for mothers and young children and offering confidential testing for STDs, HIV, and tuberculosis when few other options exist.

Preparedness

When natural disasters like floods strike, local health departments serve as the lead agency for medical response, coordinating emergency shelters, managing the distribution of critical medications, and providing clear, science-based information to protect the public and prevent panic.

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Legislative Priorities: Investing in What Works

Maintaining state funding for local health departments at the FY 25–26 level is a critical investment in the safety and well-being of every West Virginian. Under West Virginia State Code, the public health system relies on shared state and local responsibility to deliver foundational services that prevent disease, protect clean water and food, strengthen emergency preparedness, reduce health disparities, and stop small problems before they become costly crises. Continued legislative support enables local health departments to use data-driven strategies that improve efficiency, protect both state and local budgets through cost avoidance, and ensure that every community, rural and urban alike, has the basic public health protections residents expect and deserve.

Our Primary Legal Purpose

The primary legal purpose of state funding is to ensure that every county—no matter how small or rural—can deliver the four Basic Public Health Services mandated by WV Code §16-2-11, establishing a statewide floor of protection so all West Virginians have equal access to disease surveillance, clean water inspections, and health education performed uniformly under state performance-based standards, regardless of local tax capacity or county lines.

Your Economic Return on Investment

Public health funding is preventative by design and saves the state money over time by avoiding far greater downstream costs. Investing in local health departments to track outbreaks or provide vaccines is significantly less expensive than paying for emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and lost productivity during a public health crisis, while also supporting workforce stability by keeping communities healthy and children in school.

The Shared Partnership

Under WV Code §16-2-14, West Virginia's public health system is intentionally structured as a dual-funding model in which local governments contribute because they have a direct stake in community safety, while the state provides aid and grants to ensure equity among counties and maintain a coordinated, effective response during statewide emergencies such as pandemics or floods.

Maintaining funding for local health departments is the difference between preventing a crisis quietly and paying for it loudly later.

Local health department funding is one of the few line items in the state budget that protects every single constituent, in every county, every day.

This session, maintaining local health department funding at the FY 25–26 level is not an expansion of government, it is the fulfillment of the state's legal responsibility and the smartest investment in public safety, fiscal responsibility, and community stability.

We urge the Legislature to protect this funding and protect West Virginians before a crisis forces the costlier alternative.