AN AWARD WINNING YEAR

Hamilton County Public Health educates, serves and protects our community for a healthier future.

Our new mission statement simply but descriptively captures the essence of what we do every day in the world of public health. Much of the work we do—inspections, vaccinations, epidemiology, licensing—lives “under the radar” and serves to protect our community from disease. In fact, one of the best quotes I have seen that perfectly captures the work of public health came from Cincinnati Magazine in a recent story about our tuberculosis program: “It’s always impressive when a public health crisis is averted before the public even knows it exists.”

That is exactly what made 2013 such an exciting year for Hamilton County Public Health. It was one of those rare years in which we got to slide out from under the radar and show our community, our state and even the rest of our continent just what it is that we do every day to keep our region protected for a healthier future.

The recognition kicked off in April when one of our sanitarians earned the Ohio Environmental Health Association Sanitarian of the Year award. This individual was recognized for work on development and implementation of educational and training programs covering safe handling practices for professional food handlers, making education important for this group.

Again adhering to our agency mantra, this sanitarian taught safe food handling practices for more than 200 attendees during the year. In addition, we were able to develop a training program covering safe handling practices and compliance for vendors at the County’s farmers markets. Farmers markets are an important target as they are seasonal and not typically staffed by trained personnel.

We were able to implement a training program with the State of Ohio for vendors at the County’s farmers markets. This program was developed in cooperation with the Ohio Environmental Health Association and the Ohio Department of Agriculture and provides vendors with the necessary training and information to ensure the safety of the food they sell.

These efforts have produced significantly more sustainable outcomes in terms of working with people to understand and subsequently change their behavior. I am particularly pleased with the team’s grasp of our agency mantra of education over enforcement in tackling a difficult mental health issue as it relates to public health.

Not to be outdone, another of our sanitarians snagged the Southwest Ohio Environmental Health Association Sanitarian of the Year award. This individual was recognized for work on development and implementation of educational programming for County licensees.

Later in the year, one of our more recent efforts received recognition. Social media—Facebook, Twitter and YouTube—have become today’s standard for communication. Particularly in the world of public health, it is increasingly important to reach constituents with pertinent and timely messaging delivered in an easily “digestible” format. Hamilton County Public Health embarked on an extensive social media program approximately two years ago and it has already paid significant dividends.

Not only are we now able to reach highly-targeted audiences with specific health messages, but we are doing so in a variety of formats, from Twitter’s quick messaging to fully demonstrating healthy practices via video on YouTube. Washington University conducted a study among public health agencies across the U.S. and discovered that one agency is the most “followed” by its peer groups—Hamilton County Public Health!

Social media work was again recognized last fall by the National Public Health Information Coalition. At its annual symposium, the organization recognized our social media program with its Silver Award for Excellence in Public Health Communication.

The crown jewel in our year of recognition was winning the Samuel J. Crumbine Consumer Protection Award. The Crumbine Award, sponsored by the Conference for Food Protection, is a prestigious international award given to local environmental health jurisdictions that demonstrate excellence and continual improvement in a...
comprehensive food protection program. The purpose of the award is to encourage improvement and stimulate public interest in food service sanitation. The award is named in honor of Dr. Samuel J. Crambines (1862 - 1954), and an 1888 graduate of the Cincinnati College of Medicine and Surgery, a sanitarian-physician and public health pioneer who was renowned for his innovative methods of improving public health protection.

This is the preeminent award in food protection, so naturally we are thrilled. We have worked extremely hard to develop a program that not only protects the citizens of Hamilton County, but also works closely with our partners in the food service industry with an emphasis on education over enforcement. The award is particularly exciting in that it is the 50th anniversary of the last time Hamilton County Public Health received the award.

Criteria for an award-winning program include:

• Sustained excellence as documented by specific outcomes and achievements and evidenced by continual improvements in the components of a comprehensive program;
• Demonstrated improvements in planning, managing and evaluating a comprehensive program;
• Innovative and effective use of program methods and problem solving to identify and reduce risk factors that are known to cause foodborne illness; and
• Providing targeted outreach, forming partnerships and participating in forums that foster communication and information exchange among regulators, industry and consumer representatives.

For an agency that most times carries on its mission outside public view, 2013 was most gratifying for the Hamilton County Public Health team. Even though we work to prevent disease during the course of our everyday responsibilities, every so often, it is nice to get caught doing a good job! Please join me in congratulating the team at Hamilton County Public Health for a remarkable year.

Setting the stage for future award-winning public health practices, the Hamilton County Board of Health, along with our staff, undertook a strategic planning session during 2013. With the excitement of public health accreditation upon us, as well as whole changes in our nation’s health system, we closely examined our practices and revised overall direction for our services. Not only have we completely revised our Program Plan and associated work plans, but we have also developed new mission, vision and values statements to reflect our direction.

You have already been introduced to our new mission statement, mentioned at the beginning of this report. Our new vision statement succinctly captures the direction established in our strategic plan: Healthy choices. Healthy lives. Healthy communities.

Finally, our revived values reflect the new face of public health as it relates to our communities and the areas we serve:

• Everyone deserves an opportunity to live a healthy, fulfilling life.
• We can and should be leaders in our community by working collaboratively with others.
• A healthier community reinforces the economic vitality of the region.
• Accurate and timely information and services will better equip people to make healthy choices and strengthen the entire community.
• Hamilton County Public Health’s work to educate and to ensure compliance can result in a healthier community and environment.
• Our team will be competent and strive to continuously improve delivery of our services.

We look forward to continuing to educate, serve and protect our community in 2014 and beyond.

Stay healthy!
Tim Ingram
Health Commissioner

DISEASE PREVENTION
During 2013, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Prevention Grant funds were utilized to provide free testing, counseling and risk-reduction interventions to Hamilton County residents. During 2013, Disease Investigation Staff received 733 reports of syphilis infection and 303 reports of HIV infection. Of these, 557 required investigation and 497 were new infections. In total, 344 (96 percent) have received treatment for syphilis, many on-site in weekly clinics. Eighty-nine percent of those newly identified HIV infections were successfully linked to HIV-related specialty care.

The Tuberculosis (TB) clinic provides walk-in TB testing for more than 3,000 Hamilton County residents annually. During 2013, 14 persons with active tuberculosis disease and more than 140 with latent TB infections received diagnostic testing and medical treatment. Staff provided 2,871 TB skin tests, 671 chest x-rays, 1,166 prescriptions and 757 physician visits.

Through the Bureau for Children with Medical Handicaps (BCMH) Program, public health nurses provided assistance to parents so their children could receive diagnostic, therapeutic and service coordination services. Public health nurses also provided immunizations to adults in five locations throughout the County; and assisted parents of children with deadbeat low levels to take measures that reduce those levels and safeguard their children’s health.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
Emergency Preparedness staff continued to work with the 45 jurisdictions to maintain a plan that utilizes familiar local places as Points of Dispensing (PODs). It is critical to have enough locations close to where populations live so that children could receive diagnostic, therapeutic and service coordination services. Public health nurses also provided immunizations to adults in five locations throughout the County; and assisted parents of children with deadbeat low levels to take measures that reduce those levels and safeguard their children’s health.

PROGRAM AND SERVICES UPDATES
Butler County Health Department for the provision of maternal and child health data analysis in support of Butler County’s work related to the Ohio Equity Institute Project was initiated. This was the first full year in which the Epidemiology and Assessment Division coordinated the Child Safety Review for Hamilton County, which met six times throughout the year to discuss cases and develop recommendations. The Division also played a key role in the community-wide Cradle Cincinnati initiative, targeted at reducing infant mortality within Hamilton County. Contract-based work on several projects with Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center Division of Health and Epidemiology aimed at evaluating, improving and enhancing the utility of the Division’s injury surveillance system processes and data were implemented in 2013.

HEALTH PROMOTION AND EDUCATION
The Health Promotion and Education Division continued with county-wide messaging through the WITHRIVE! Child Care initiative. Twenty-eight child care centers adopted wellness resolutions, completed assessments and developed work plans. Work plans focused on enhancing the ability of child care centers to provide a healthy environment for all enrolled children – specifically healthy eating, increased physical activity and reduced exposure to tobacco. Child care center staff received technical assistance to assist with implementation of the wellness resolution best-practice standards, including Coordinated Approach To Child Health (CATCH) Early Childhood curriculum training, menu reviews and recommendations by a registered dietician, and educational and promotional materials. The WITHRIVE! Child Care initiative impacted 3,352 children in 2013. It will be expanded to include additional child care centers in 2014.

PLUMBING
The Division began inspection services for medical gas in Brown, Warren and Clermont Counties, in addition to its work in Hamilton County jurisdictions. This crucial service ensures that medical gas installations for human consumption comply with National Fire Protection Association standards. The Division also welcomed residential and commercial inspection services in Brown County and Saint Bernard to its areas served.

WASTE MANAGEMENT
The Division of Waste Management continued to enhance its online communications to improve access to public records and provide useful information to the community. Users can now access facility licenses, compliance information, reports on closed landfills, and view a video on how to use a HEPA vacuum to reduce lead hazards in the home.

WATER QUALITY
Hamilton County Public Health continues to partner with the Hamilton County Storm Water District (HCSWD) to address the federally mandated Phase II of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Water Quality Order. The Hamilton County Public Health Water Quality Office assumed jurisdiction and responsibility of Water Quality. The Division of Water Quality provided multiple services to HCSWD, which included using global positioning systems to map more than 1,600 household sewage treatment systems providing storm water pollution prevention services. The Division also provided technical assistance and education and best management practices to more than 500 government employees, conducting investigations for nearly 400 storm water-related complaints and actively enforcing 45 properties to connect to sanitary sewers.

VITAL STATISTICS
Vital Statistics continued to issue birth certificates for people born anywhere in Ohio. In order to serve the citizens of Hamilton County best, the Vital Statistics Program has also been working to make the ordering process for birth and death certificates simple and easy. This included evaluating ways to streamline processes and increase the efficiencies of work flows, resulting in even better customer service.

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