

## HEALTH COMMISSIONER'S MESSAGE

### Global Pandemic – Year II

Looking back over these past two years, the versatility, determination, and resilience of those in public health and healthcare is beyond remarkable. Globally, nationally, and locally, forces continue to align to combat the once-in-a-hundred-years pandemic that has significantly impacted our lives. Even with unwavering effort, nearly 900 Hamilton County residents between the ages of 20 and 95 lost their lives to COVID-19 in 2021.

While we enjoyed a bit of a reprieve during the year, new COVID variants came roaring back, only to bring the pandemic back into daily focus. However, this time we were better prepared, as the vaccination campaign reached some 60 percent of eligible Hamilton County residents. Hamilton County Public Health (HCPH) has proudly administered over 80,000 COVID vaccinations through the end of 2021 and continues to drive vaccine forward throughout the County.

The epidemiology division pivoted from the tireless days of contact tracing in 2020 to assembling data, distributing school and facility guidance, and working closely with schools and daycare facilities to manage outbreaks in 2021. The division houses a team of outbreak response specialists who jump into action providing guidance and remediation efforts to organizations experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.

While COVID-19 continued to command the lion's share of attention in public health, we never lost sight of our mission to educate, serve, and protect our community for a healthier future. As the pandemic evolved, it became apparent that we needed to make some internal changes to respond to the pandemic while continuing to provide ongoing, critical services to the communities that trust us to do so. We restructured our internal teams to manage all aspects of the pandemic, including epidemiology, nursing, operations, and logistics. This enabled us to free more staff time to devote to our ongoing services.

Our agency grew from 115 employees at the beginning of the year to more than 134 by year-end necessitating a thorough review of our physical facilities. We reconfigured part of our clinical area to accommodate the need for more examination rooms, while moving some divisions to satellite offices in downtown Cincinnati. Our agency's growth will continue to be an area of focus in our next Strategic Plan.

### Addiction is a Public Health Crisis

Throughout the pandemic, people battling the disease of addiction often found themselves in even more challenging circumstances. In some ways, the pandemic limited access to social services. However, our Harm Reduction staff creatively implemented a drive-through program in 2020 in which people could continue to access safe injection supplies and Narcan, the overdose-reversal drug. In 2021, this migrated to outdoor tent and table set ups to enhance client engagement and to promote HIV and hepatitis C testing. The motto of our Harm Reduction program in 2021 really focused on "safety, health, and wellness." Our team strives to meet people where they are in a judgment free zone.

The syringe services program distributed more than one million syringes, helping to prevent diseases such as viral hepatitis and HIV. In addition, the program operated from a new, state-of-the-art vehicle designed to provide services to clients in a safe environment. The program rotates around several locations throughout Hamilton County and supports regional efforts, as well.

### Healthy Environments

Many of us struggle to remember pre-pandemic life, as we are now quite adept in video conferencing and navigating smaller social circles. Although our new normal has shifted, the role of public health to protect the public from unhealthy environmental issues has never wavered. Landfills operate regardless of pandemic status, and public health inspection remains just as critical as before COVID-19. Our team visited landfills, construction and demolition waste sites, and scrap facilities over 300 times during the year to ensure operations performed to requirements.

The pandemic also wreaked havoc on the food service industry. While many of these businesses suffered greatly in 2020, the need for continued safe food handling practices was even more critical in 2021 as restaurants reopened after periods of stagnation. Despite pandemic restrictions, our team conducted 6,000 inspections of food service facilities, helping to ensure foodborne illness would not further complicate the landscape of COVID-19 in Hamilton County.

The past two years also found people looking inward while staying home. Rather than moving to a new home, many Hamilton County residents focused on home improvement projects. Our plumbing division reviewed almost 3,500 residential plans and issued nearly 4,000 permits for plumbing projects.

Healthy environments certainly include attention to sanitary waste disposal. The water quality team performed more than 12,000 inspections on home sewage treatment systems during the year. This team also manages stormwater issues and responded to more than 600 complaints during the 2021.

## **Disease Prevention**

While COVID continued to capture most of our attention this past year, other diseases continued to exist and even flourish. As Hamilton County's tuberculosis control agent, we continued to screen for, prevent, and treat active cases. Identifying tuberculosis early and then responding with appropriate treatment continues to keep incidence of this disease relatively low, especially as compared to other countries where tuberculosis is prevalent.

Another area of specialty is focused on the prevention of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. HCPH is a sub-recipient of federal grant to "end the HIV epidemic." While the pandemic provided a few obstacles in efforts, the team worked relentlessly to link newly-diagnosed cases to infectious disease providers for the best outcomes. Staff also worked to schedule patients for syphilis testing and provide treatment for positive cases in our clinic. Our clinical services also expanded in 2021 to include testing for all STIs broadening our reach to clients in need.

## **WeTHRIVE!**

WeTHRIVE! is a community-led initiative that creates unique partnerships between public health and communities, schools, and childcare providers, with the goal of making healthy changes that will last for generations to come. The initiative began in 2009 with three communities. Today, WeTHRIVE! impacts more than 300,000 people in 29 communities and eight school districts.

WeTHRIVE! community teams focus on one or more pathways based on the community's needs and interests. The WeTHRIVE! pathways are: chronic disease, emergency preparedness, environmental health, injury prevention, social health, and substance use/abuse.

WeTHRIVE! school districts have implemented policies to: make campuses 100 percent tobacco-free; incorporate physical activity into the classroom; add substance abuse prevention to the curricula; and adopt healthy food and beverage policies. In 2021, staff worked with the eight WeTHRIVE! School Districts to complete a detailed assessment on School Wellness Policies. We are elated to report that all eight districts are in the process of reviewing recommendations, presenting policy changes to school administration, and/or adopting the proposed changes.

## **What's Next**

The role for Hamilton County Public Health in the pandemic response will eventually end, or at least move into a manageable state. While our hope is that we will never experience another one of these in our lifetimes, the fact remains that our global society and ease of travel make future pandemics more possible. The learnings developed by public health, healthcare, and virtually all of society will serve us well in the future.

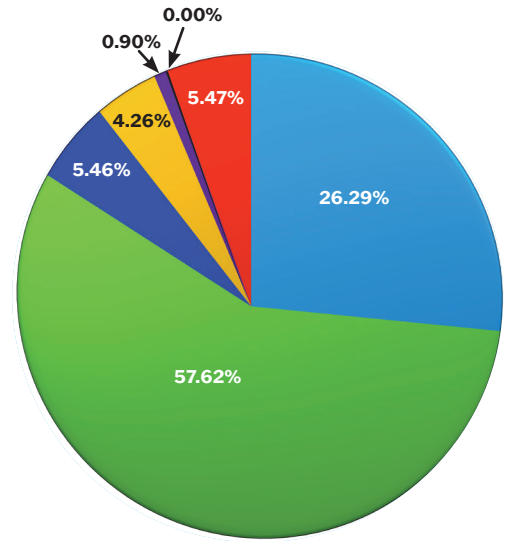
In the meantime, all functions of public health must continue – pandemic or not – to ensure a safe and healthy future for all.

Greg Kesterman  
Health Commissioner

## REVENUES & EXPENDITURES - 2021

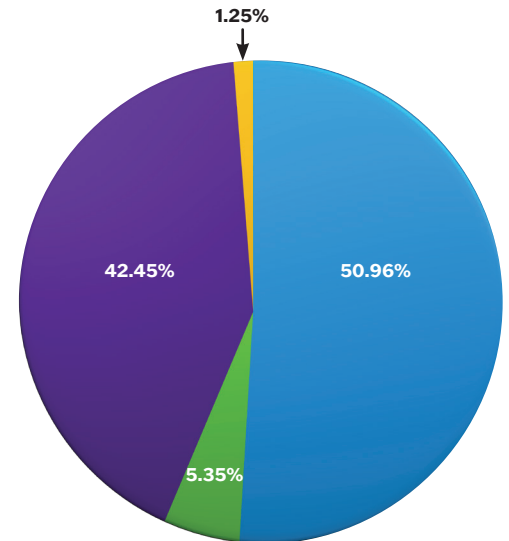
### REVENUES

■ Fees & Permits	\$5,302,399
■ Grants & Contracts	11,623,462
■ TB Control-Indigent Care Levy/Levy for Harm & Oral Care	1,101,000
■ Cities, Townships, Villages	860,050
■ State Subsidies	180,633
■ Donations	1,000
■ Other Revenue	1,102,804
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$20,171,348</b>



### EXPENDITURES

■ Personnel Services	\$10,079,576
■ State & Other Agency Fees	1,058,411
■ Operating Expenses	8,396,204
■ Capital Outlay	246,979
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$19,781,171</b>



## 2021 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

### Community Health

Birth Records Issued	13,820
Death Records Issued	31,678
Emergency Medicine Points of Dispensing Sites	104
Total Tuberculosis Patients	133
Active Cases of Tuberculosis	22

### Harm Reduction

Total Client Visits to Syringe Exchange	15,507
Syringes Distributed	1,070,077
HIV Tests Administered at Syringe Exchange	448
Hepatitis C Tests Administered at Syringe Exchange	134
Current Exchange Locations	8
WeTHRIVE! Communities/Added	29/1

### Environmental Health

Backflow Surveys Completed/Devices Registered	348
Food Service Inspections	7,037
Food Safety Training - Individuals Trained	549
Lead Investigations Completed	22
Medical Gas Inspections	101
Nuisance Inspections	1,436
Plumbing Permits Issued	4,218
Rabies Quarantine Notices Sent	673
School Inspections	345
Sewage Treatment System (STS) Inspections/Re-inspections	15,229
Swimming Pool/Spa Inspections	1,598
Tattoo/Piercing Facility Inspections	41
Waste Facility Inspections	152

## Hamilton County Public Health Mission

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

## Hamilton County Public Health Vision

Healthy choices. Healthy lives. Healthy communities.

## District Advisory Council

Members include presidents of township boards of trustees, village mayors and the President of the Board of County Commissioners. Members are required by law to meet annually in March. They select the members of the Board of Health, make recommendations to the Board of Health and authorize city contractual agreements.

Chairman	Rose Stertz
Secretary	Jodie Leis

## Board of Health

The Board of Health is the governing body of Hamilton County Public Health. It has the authority to adopt rules and regulations which have the same status as law, enact policies within the jurisdiction of HCPH and hire a health commissioner. Meetings are held at the HCPH office on the second Monday of each month at 4 p.m.

President	Mark Rippe
Vice President	Elizabeth Kelly, M.D.
Board Members	Jim Brett
	Dan Meloy
	Tracey A. Puthoff, Esq.

## Health Commissioner and Staff

Health Commissioner	Greg Kesterman
Assistant Health Commissioner	Jennifer Mooney, PhD, Department of Community Health Services
Assistant Health Commissioner	Craig Davidson, Department of Environmental Health Services

## Divisions

Disease Prevention	Martha Walter, Director
Environmental Health	Jeremy Hessel, Director
Epidemiology and Assessment	David Carlson, Director
Health Promotion and Education	Mary Ellen Knaebel, Director
Plumbing	Lisa Humble, Director
Waste Management	Chuck DeJonckheere, Director
Water Quality	Chris Griffith, Director

## FREQUENTLY REQUESTED INFORMATION

### Customer Service and Important Phone Numbers

Main Number . . . . .	(513) 946-7800
Administration/Health Commissioner's Office . . . . .	(513) 946-7822
Main Fax . . . . .	(513) 946-7890

### Web and Social Media

Hamilton County Public Health Online . . . . .	www.HCPH.org
Follow us on Twitter . . . . .	@HamCoHealth
Join us on Facebook . . . . .	www.fb.com/HamCoHealth
YouTube . . . . .	www.youtube.com/HamCoHealth
WeTHRIVE! <sup>SM</sup> . . . . .	www.WatchUsThrive.org