



## Steps Have Been Taken to Improve Community Public Health Infrastructure Throughout Florida

### *at a glance*

Key public health outcomes have continued to improve in Florida since our 2003 review. The Department of Health has taken steps we recommended to strengthen Florida's public health infrastructure. The department implemented a statewide community health assessment and health improvement planning initiative and requires county health department leadership in conducting assessments. The department also strengthened its quality improvement process to more accurately assess and respond to local health department and community needs. In addition, it has modified and updated its allocation methodology for local prenatal care funding.

### Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken in response to a 2003 OPPAGA review of the Florida Department of Health's Community Public Health Program.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Background

The Department of Health's mission is to promote and protect the health and safety of all people in Florida by delivering quality public health services and promoting health care standards. The department's Community Public Health

Program supports this mission by overseeing the provision and delivery of public health services in Florida. The program's services are grouped into three main categories: family health, infectious disease prevention and control, and environmental health. Family health services include providing basic primary health care for adults and prenatal care for high-risk pregnant women.<sup>3</sup> Infectious disease prevention and control services detect, control, and eradicate infectious diseases and provide vaccinations to children without health care insurance.<sup>4</sup> Environmental health services focus on maintaining a healthy environment by investigating outbreaks of food-borne illnesses and permitting and inspecting private septic tanks.<sup>5</sup>

Through state-county partnerships, the Community Public Health Program delivers most of its services via the state's 67 county health departments. Each county health department provides a basic core set of services that are outlined in an annual contract between the board of county commissioners and the department. The program's central office provides leadership and support and administers statewide activities including public health laboratory and

<sup>1</sup> Section 11.15, *F.S.*

<sup>2</sup> *State Faces Challenges to Improving Community Public Health in Florida*, OPPAGA [Report No. 03-71](#), December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Family health services also include food and nutrition services for women and children, family planning services, dental services, and prevention, education, and treatment of chronic diseases and conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and epilepsy.

<sup>4</sup> Infectious disease prevention and control services also include education for prevention and early detection of infectious diseases; and treatment of persons with HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and tuberculosis.

<sup>5</sup> Environmental health services also include regulating certain facilities, such as migrant labor camps, group care housing, and school cafeterias; testing drinking water; and investigating animal bites.

pharmacy services and educational campaigns to prevent disease and promote healthy behaviors.<sup>6</sup> The central office also coordinates health and medical services in the event of a man-made or natural disaster.

For Fiscal Year 2006-07, the Legislature authorized 1,318 FTEs for the Community Public Health Program and appropriated \$1.96 billion. The majority of this appropriation (\$1.56 billion or 80%), comes from federal and state trust funds, county contributions, Medicaid revenues, and client fees. The remaining \$398 million is from general revenue.

Our 2003 review found that while public health outcomes in Florida had been improving, barriers in Florida’s public health infrastructure as well as demographic and socioeconomic characteristics presented challenges to improving the state’s overall public health status.<sup>7</sup> To address these challenges, we recommended that the Legislature direct the Department of Health to establish and regularly conduct a standardized community health assessment process, modify its quality improvement process for county health departments, and review and update its funding allocation methodologies to better address local priorities and needs.

## Current Status

Since our 2003 review, key public health outcomes in Florida have continued to improve, and Florida’s overall health ranking improved from 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in 2003 to 40<sup>th</sup> in 2005.<sup>8</sup> Since 2003, the department has strengthened Florida’s public health infrastructure by implementing a community health assessment and health improvement planning initiative statewide, modifying the quality improvement process for county health departments, and modifying and updating the allocation methodology for prenatal care funding.

While fluctuation has occurred, key public health outcomes continue to improve. As shown in Exhibit 1, the rate of teen births in Florida has continued to decline. Over the past 10 years, births

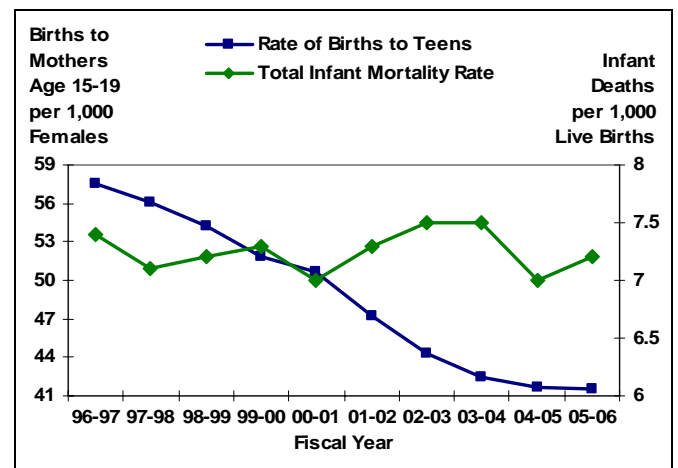
<sup>6</sup> The central program office also contracts with organizations such as community and migrant health centers, academic-affiliated institutions, and non-profit public health organizations to deliver public health services.

<sup>7</sup> Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics include population and poverty, language and other cultural obstacles, as well as prevalence of chronic diseases.

<sup>8</sup> *America’s Health Rankings™ 2005 Edition*, United Health Foundation.

to teen mothers (from 15 to 19 years old) fell from 57.5 per 1,000 young women in Fiscal Year 1996-97 to 41.5 in Fiscal Year 2005-06; births to teen mothers declined by 6% since our 2003 review. Also shown in Exhibit 1, the total infant mortality rate, while fluctuating over the past 10 years, improved from 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in Fiscal Year 2003-04 to 7.2 in Fiscal Year 2005-06.

**Exhibit 1**  
**Total Infant Mortality Rates and Teen Births Have Declined**



Source: Department of Health. Fiscal Year 2005-06 data is provisional.

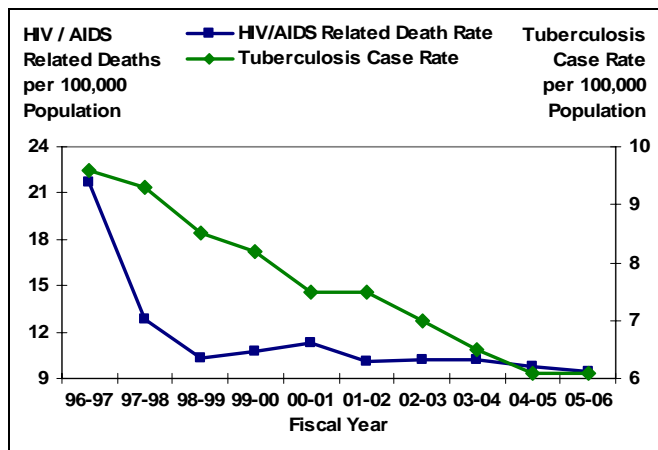
To improve birth outcomes, the department has expanded its Healthy Start initiative that targets prenatal care services to high-risk pregnant women and newborns. In Fiscal Year 2004-05, the department implemented Mom-Care, a program within the Healthy Start initiative that strives to provide prenatal services to Medicaid-eligible pregnant women as early in their pregnancies as possible. In addition, the department is focusing on improving women’s health care prior to conception and between pregnancies as well as improving prenatal care.<sup>9</sup>

Florida’s infectious disease and immunization outcomes also have improved. Exhibit 2 shows that over the past 10 years and since our 2003 review, both the HIV/AIDS-related death rate and the number of tuberculosis infections have continued to decline. The department attributes these declines to improvements in infectious

<sup>9</sup> Recognizing this expanded focus, the department renamed the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health to the Bureau of Infant, Maternal, and Reproductive Health.

disease technology such as increased testing sensitivity, which facilitates earlier entry into treatment and prevents further infection. In addition, Florida’s immunization rate for two-year-old children against vaccine-preventable diseases has continued to improve, with 86.6% of children immunized in Fiscal Year 2005-06.<sup>10</sup>

**Exhibit 2  
HIV/AIDS-Related Deaths and the Incidence of Tuberculosis Has Declined**



Source: Department of Health.

Even though Florida’s key public health outcomes have continued to improve, challenges still exist. For example, while the overall infant mortality rate has improved, the non-white infant mortality rate has worsened slightly from 12.4 deaths per 1,000 live births in Fiscal Year 1996-97 to 12.6 in Fiscal Year 2005-06, which is about 75% higher than the overall Florida rate. In addition, the number of Florida residents diagnosed with certain infectious diseases has increased slightly. For example, the HIV/AIDS case rate increased from 25.9 per 100,000 persons in Fiscal Year 2003-04 to 26.7 in Fiscal Year 2005-06. However, the department indicates that this increase is likely due to improved screening and reporting procedures and data management techniques, both within the department and the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rather than increased incidence of HIV/AIDS.

<sup>10</sup> The department received two national awards for its immunization efforts. The first was awarded for ranking second in the nation in 2004 by achieving an 88.5% coverage level for a specific immunization protocol and the second was awarded for having the second most improved immunization rate in the nation between 2001 and 2004.

The department has established a standardized community health assessment process that requires county health department leadership in conducting assessments. To help county health departments better identify and address local health needs, the department implemented the Comprehensive Assessment, Strategic Success (COMPASS) project, a statewide community health assessment and health improvement planning initiative. COMPASS utilizes the nationally recognized Mobilizing for Actions through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) model for community health planning.<sup>11</sup> To facilitate participation by county health departments, the department provides extensive training and support on the assessment process. The department has established an advisory group comprising county health department representatives and central office program staff to guide counties through the assessment process. The department also plans and coordinates an annual statewide meeting focused on community health improvement where counties can share best practices. And, the department provides county-level public health statistics, including behavioral risk factor data, to assist counties with data collection and analyses for the assessments.<sup>12</sup>

The department reported that all 67 counties in Florida are engaged in some form of community health planning, a substantial improvement from our 2003 report, when just over half of the counties engaged in this planning. Currently, 53 county health departments participate in the COMPASS initiative and most of them are using the MAPP model.<sup>13,14</sup> Health assessments have enabled counties to better address local public health needs and priorities through actions such as forming local planning councils and applying

<sup>11</sup> MAPP provides county health departments a comprehensive approach for collecting and analyzing data, identifying and assessing community public health and medical resources, establishing local public health priorities, and planning actions and solutions to improve public health status.

<sup>12</sup> The department provides data via its public health statistics website, Community Health Assessment Resource Tool Set (CHARTS), and is currently working to enhance this system, for example, by providing zip-code level data.

<sup>13</sup> 2005 DOH COMPASS Annual Capacity Survey.

<sup>14</sup> The department reports that the 2004-2005 hurricane seasons likely affected some counties’ ability to participate. The department is currently focusing on helping counties who have not yet implemented COMPASS.

for and receiving supplemental funding. (Examples are highlighted in Exhibit 3.)

The department has implemented a new quality improvement process for county health departments. Since our 2003 review, the department has redesigned its quality improvement process for county health departments. This new process, which the department piloted with 20 counties in August 2005, more accurately assesses the areas in which county health departments need to improve, thereby better facilitating continuous improvement. Central office staff no longer conduct these reviews. Instead, county health departments self-report data on a standardized, web-based report card to produce scores on key public health and administrative performance standards. Central office staff then tailors plans to specifically address problem areas identified by county health departments. To support this

process, the department has developed a web-based compendium that identifies best practices.<sup>15</sup>

The department has updated its allocation methodology for prenatal care funding. To better ensure that prenatal health care funding addresses local needs, the department, starting July 2007, will allocate Healthy Start program funds using an updated allocation methodology. Based on recommendations from a Healthy Start Allocation workgroup, the department will gradually reallocate funding over a five-year period by applying the updated methodology to 20% of the base funding every year. If successful, the department could use this approach to update allocation methodologies for other local public health funding.

<sup>15</sup> The web-based compendium features virtual information and a training tool box that provides detailed information on how to replicate best practices.

**Exhibit 3  
Counties Are Achieving Community-Based Successes With the COMPASS Initiative**

<b>Calhoun, Franklin, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Jackson, Jefferson, Liberty, Madison, Suwannee, Wakulla, and Washington counties</b>
\$69,000 awarded to these counties through Florida’s Rural Health Network to conduct MAPP-based community health assessments. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Citrus, Jefferson, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, and Wakulla counties</b>
Established local health advisory councils to lead health improvement planning activities.
<b>Escambia, Lake, Martin, Palm Beach and St. Lucie counties</b>
Reorganized their county health department infrastructures, including adding staff positions, to support community health assessment planning.
<b>Orange County</b>
Allocated \$120,000 to coordinate a MAPP-based process through a partnership comprising local government entities, the county health department, and the local health planning council.
<b>Pinellas County</b>
Awarded a \$9 million, five-year federal grant to address strategic public health issues identified as a result of their MAPP process.

<sup>1</sup> This amount includes in-kind match.  
Source: Department of Health.

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