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Guidelines chart road map for public health governing boards.pdf

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NEW GUIDELINES from the National Association of Local Boards of Health are designed as a road map for boards that govern health departments.

The Six Functions of Public Health Governance, approved in November, focus on policy development, resource stewardship, legal authority, partner engagement, continuous improvement and oversight.

"I think the six functions of public health governance are going to be a guidepost," Anne Drabczyk, PhD, CEO of NALBOH, told The Nation's Health. "It becomes the standards for accountability. In that perspective, it is groundbreaking."

The association worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, partners and experts from the public health field to identify, review and develop the six functions. Drabczyk said the guidelines will give public health leaders the direction needed for progress, much the same way workers in the public health field follow standards for accreditation.

"Now, if your board has the same level of awareness of their accountability through these six functions, you're going to have synergy," she said. "We're all in the same boat, rowing in the same direction. If you have that kind of shared experience, it's a great equalizer for everyone."

Under each of the six functions, the guidelines outline several specific actions for public health boards to follow. For example, in policy development, the recommendation is for the boards to "lead and contribute to the development of policies that protect, promote and improve public health while ensuring that the agency and its components remain consistent with the laws and rules (local, state and federal) to which it is subject." Boards may do so through such actions as setting short and long-term priorities and strategic plans and evaluating existing policies regularly, among other actions.

For continuous improvement, the guidelines recommend that public health boards "routinely evaluate, monitor and set measurable outcomes for improving community health status and the public health agency's/governing body's own ability to meet its responsibilities." Effective partner engagement includes representing a broad cross-section of the community, leading "open, constructive dialogue" on public health issues, "serving as a strong link between the public health agency, the community and other stakeholder organizations" and building connections between the public and partners to underscore the positive impacts of current health trends, according to the guidelines.

The National Association of Local Boards of Health will devote each quarterly issue of its News Briefs this year to the six functions, with the first issue giving an overview and each subsequent issue going in depth about two of the functions. Drabczyk said she is also hoping to present information on the functions at APHA's 141st Annual Meeting in Boston in November.

"This is, now, our road map going forward," Drabczyk said. "This is the work of our constituents. This is our responsibility to fully define and disseminate these functions and to start to gather the case studies and all of the work behind giving life to these six functions. I think there's going to be a lot of momentum with this."