



# Institute for Community Health

A collaboration of the Cambridge Health Alliance, Mount Auburn Hospital, and Partners Healthcare

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### **From research to advocacy: Assessing the local public health infrastructure in Massachusetts.**

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Since the 1988 publication of IOM's report on the state of public health, numerous calls have been made to improve the public health infrastructure in the U.S. In Massachusetts, the Coalition for Local Public Health (CLPH) is working to improve the capacity and performance of local public health authorities (LPHAs) through advocacy and education. In 2005, the CLPH commissioned the Institute for Community Health to conduct a statewide survey of LPHAs. The survey gathered basic information about annual budgets, descriptions of the workforce, responsibilities, and staffing needs.

**Methods:** Self-administered surveys were distributed to the state's 352 LPHAs during regional emergency preparedness meetings and through mail or email. Survey data were entered into an Access database and analyzed in SAS 9.0.

**Results:** Approximately 54% of all LPHAs participated in the study. Little consistency across municipalities was found with respect to staffing levels, education requirements for personnel, or annual budgets. Larger communities (>40,000) reported the greatest increases in annual budgets over a 3-year period (10%), a fuller array of public health employees, and a highly educated workforce. Smaller communities (<10,000) reported only a 2% increase in annual budgets and 47% have no full-time staff. Smaller communities are also more likely to contract out essential public health services. Other findings indicate future workforce challenges, with nearly 20% of the workforce eligible to retire in the next 2 years.

**Discussion:** The implications of study findings and how the data will be used to advocate for improvements in local public health infrastructure will be discussed.