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Public Health Protects Communities: Illinois Strengthens Workforce and Community Response During a Critical Moment

IPHA highlights workforce investments, scientific advancements, and community-based programs as public health systems face growing pressure nationwide

Springfield, IL – As National Public Health Week (April 6 to 12, 2026) approaches, the Illinois Public Health Association (IPHA) is highlighting the essential role public health systems play in protecting communities at a time when those systems are facing increasing strain and many of the gains public health has achieved risk being taken for granted.

“Public health protects communities every day, often in ways people don’t see,” said Tom Hughes, Executive Director of the Illinois Public Health Association. “Through advocacy, workforce development, and strong partnerships with local health departments, Illinois is leading efforts to expand access to care and strengthen public health systems across Illinois.”

Public health has added decades to life expectancy and dramatically improved the quality of life for Illinois residents through scientific advancement, prevention, and early intervention. Today, those same evidence-based approaches, from community health outreach to cancer screening and disease prevention, continue to drive better outcomes across Illinois.

Across the state, these efforts are strengthening the public health workforce and expanding community-based programs that improve access, prevention, and long-term health outcomes.

Recent IPHA initiatives include:

- Expansion of the Community Health Worker (CHW) workforce to connect residents with care and resources
- Targeted SNAP outreach to improve food access and improve community health outcomes
- Colorectal cancer prevention and screening initiatives to increase early detection and reduce disparities
- Maternal and Child Health efforts to ensure safe and healthy environments for children to grow and thrive with a focus on advancing efforts to prevent, mitigate, and treat childhood adversity and trauma
- Vaccine access and education efforts to increase vaccination rates and reduce vaccine-preventable diseases, especially in underserved communities
- Healthy aging initiatives, including the Dementia Caregiver program and the HIV Age Positively Policy and Advocacy Center, to support aging populations across Illinois

These efforts come at a time when public health systems nationwide are facing workforce shortages, evolving health threats, and ongoing funding uncertainty, all of which have direct implications for communities across Illinois.



IPHA represents public health professionals and organizations across Illinois, playing a key role in advancing public health policy and advocacy, supporting workforce development and training, and connecting partners across sectors to improve community health. Through its work, IPHA provides a statewide perspective on the challenges and opportunities shaping public health today.

National Public Health Week Activities

During National Public Health Week (April 6 to 12, 2026), IPHA will highlight daily themes, host educational programming, and elevate the work of public health professionals across Illinois.

IPHA leadership and subject matter experts are available for interviews to discuss the current state of public health in Illinois, workforce and funding challenges, community-based solutions, and emerging public health priorities.

Public health protects communities every day, often in ways that go unseen. Good health doesn't just happen. National Public Health Week provides an opportunity to recognize that work while reinforcing the importance of continued investment in the systems and professionals that keep Illinois communities healthy.

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About the Illinois Public Health Association

Established in 1940, IPHA, an affiliate of the American Public Health Association, is Illinois' oldest and largest statewide voluntary organization dedicated exclusively to public health. The Association works to strengthen and support health across Illinois communities by mobilizing partners and advancing health equity. Learn more at www.IPHA.com.