



County of Berks
COUNTY OF BERKS
PENNSYLVANIA



Berks County Final Report

Study of the Delivery of Health and Public Health Services in Berks County

March 28, 2023

HEALTH MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATES

OVERVIEW

➤ STUDY PURPOSE AND PROCESS

➤ GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING A BERKS PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL

➤ RECOMMENDATIONS



■ PURPOSE

In April 2022, the County of Berks commissioned a study of the Delivery of Health and Public Health Services in Berks County to:

- Assess the health and public health services in Berks County to identify opportunities to ensure that all residents have resources and opportunities to pursue their highest level of health
- Examine how the County coordinates and aligns cross-sector action tied to public health that engages county residents, businesses, schools, community organizations, and government sectors
- Ensure Berks County has community-informed information to assess how health care and public health services support county residents in improving health outcomes and health equity

This report aims to recommend steps for the County to be able to lead in public health emergencies as well as in preventing avoidable health conditions and closing health disparities



■ PROCESS

This study was informed by quantitative and qualitative data and guided by a five-member core team of public health and health experts from County government, community-based organizations, and a private citizen with decades of leadership experience in the County

Quantitative

- Reviewed State and County health statistics to establish a baseline understanding of existing public health needs
- Analyzed State and County health statistics, geo-mapped data and reviewed recent CHNAs
- Compared Berks County's health profile to adjacent and similar counties

Qualitative

- Engaged 81 members of the Berks County community via focus groups including residents, front-line workers, and health program staff.
- Conducted 10 key informant interviews with community leaders and healthcare stakeholders



■ GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING A BERKS PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL



Health leaders and stakeholders in Berks County are committed to assuring the health of Berks County residents and an approach that -

- **Coordinates public health services** already under way in the county (CBOs, hospitals, county and city agencies) and **supports collective action** so that county resources are targeted at needs not addressed elsewhere so county funds can have the greatest impact.
- **Provides one clear, trusted voice** about public health threats, response, and concerns to guide county residents, businesses, schools, and private and public organizations in public health emergencies.
- **Increases access to public health data** to the public and key public health partners.



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- **Identifies clear roles and responsibilities** for each public and private partner and **reduces duplication** of county, city, and state efforts. For example, the County will not assume roles where the State has jurisdiction but will establish a mechanism to collaborate with the State to ensure that public health analytics, emergency response and communications roles meet the needs of the residents of Berks County, as well as public and private sector organizations.
- **Improves the health of county populations** that exhibit the **greatest disparities** by supporting upstream factors that affect health such as access to nutrition, housing, healthcare and benefits.
- **Ensures that prevention and wellness information** and resources are accessible both in English and in Spanish.

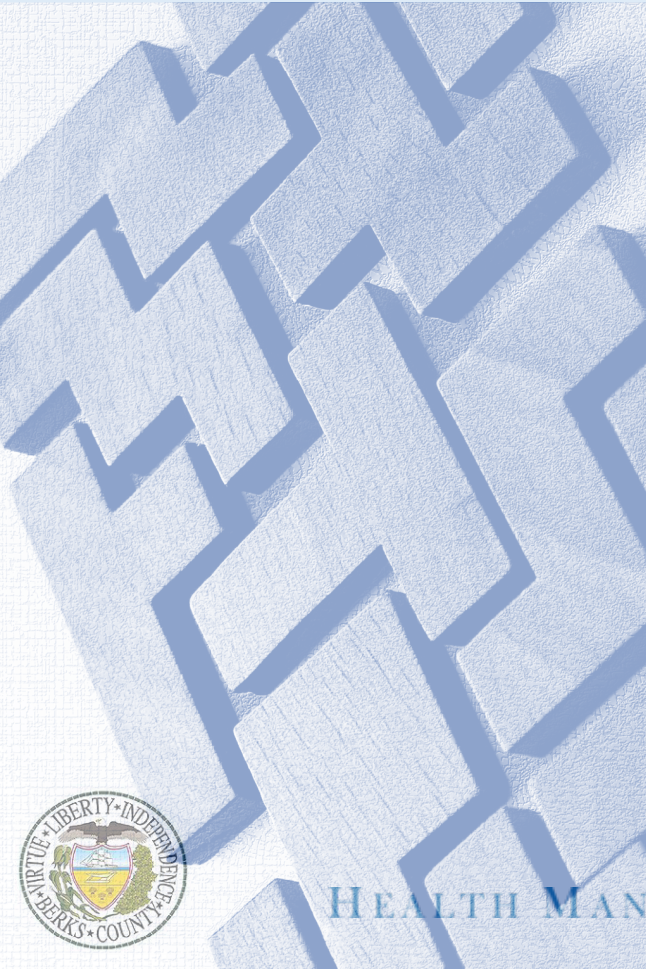


RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create a **Berks County Health Director** position to lead public health collective action and coordination and serve as a trusted communicator about public health information.

Option 1: This position will be an employee of the County of Berks and will be accountable to the County Commissioners.

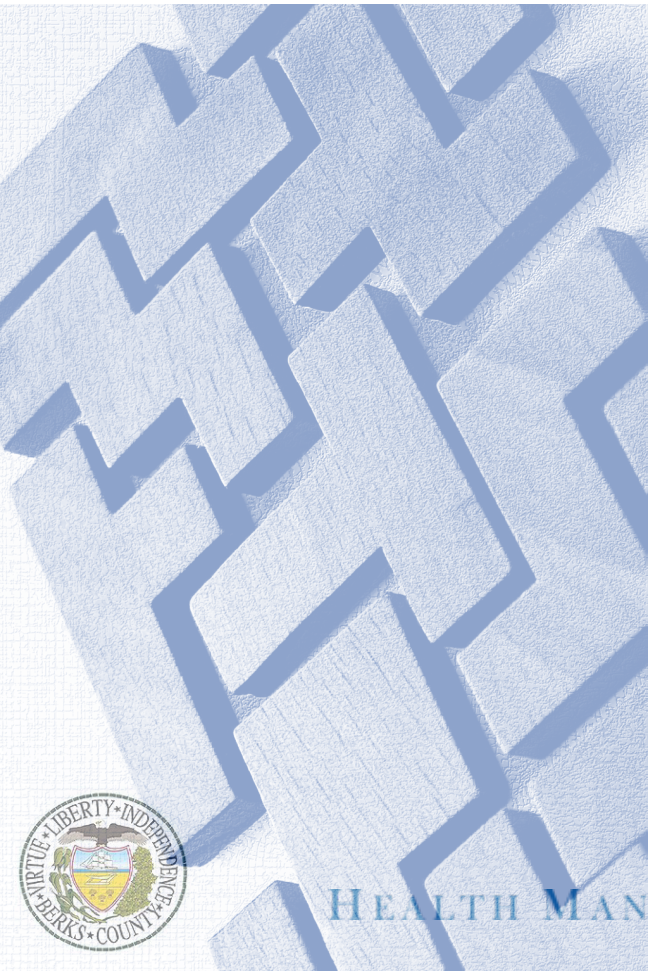
Option 2: This position will be housed in a trusted non-governmental public health focused organization, which will be accountable to the County Commissioners.



RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Develop a new **Berks County Public Health Advisory Panel** to advise the Health Director and guide public health assessment, policy, and assurance activities.

- Panel members should collectively bring strong expertise in public health, behavioral health, and the factors that shape health.
- The members of the panel shall serve without compensation.



RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Support the establishment of a **Healthy Berks Coalition** to serve as a coordinating body for public health efforts in the county. The Public Health Director will coordinate or co-facilitate the Coalition's activities. This Coalition may include leadership from:

- Federally qualified health center and community health centers
- Tower-Reading and Penn State-St. Joseph's Hospitals
- United Way and community-based organizations, including the Hispanic Center and Berks Co. Community Foundation
- Faith-based groups providing health and social services
- Co-County Wellness Services and other county public health organizations
- County mental health, disability, emergency services, data and environmental health organizations
- Public, parochial, and private school systems



RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Create a **Berks County Health Analyst** position to improve Berks County-specific public health data completeness and accuracy, who will report to the Health Director. This position will:

- Identify data gaps
- Provide census tract/zip code level monitoring of Berks County residents' health
- Support a strong response to pandemics or other public health emergencies
- Be a **County employee** or **subcontractor**



SUMMARY

- These recommendations will put the county on a path to meeting public health needs right away and will enable a **broad range of options** in enhancing its ability to meet public health needs in the future.
- They will also provide a glide path for the **option of establishing a public health department** should that be desired in the future.

