Public health is “what we as a society collectively do to ensure the conditions for people to be healthy.” (Institute of Medicine, 1988). In this context, the Public Health Nurse must be viewed as a vital partner in the framework of local public health.

The Public Health Nurse is the one health professional with both clinical capability and public health expertise to assess the impact of social determinants of health on disease conditions related to the community.

Public health nursing interventions, such as immunization efforts; communicable and non-communicable disease control; chronic disease and injury prevention; and coordination of local all-hazards preparedness and response are focused on providing essential population-based services.

In today’s changing healthcare landscape, regardless of practice area, clinicians have a mission to keep their patients healthy where they live and work. Public Health Nurses are uniquely equipped to play a role in the local public health arena by keeping their communities healthy.

This Guide is meant to serve as a:

* Guideline for orienting newly-hired public health nurses, and for those who are novices to the specialty of public health nursing
* Resource for public health nurses well established in their practice
* Reference text for nurse educators
* Guide for Boards of Health/Health Departments to understand the many roles and responsibilities of public health nurses

This Guide is intended to be a “living” document, formatted to allow for electronic updates. It embodies the tradition of public health nursing, which is to continually adapt and change its focus and objectives as the fields of public health and nursing evolve. The role of the public health nurse is by no means restricted to the topics presently addressed in this Guide. It is intended to offer general guidelines that may be expanded or modified as public health nurses see relevant in their settings. The resources outlined in each chapter are meant to be starting points for public health nurses in developing their own programs.

In the pages following in this Guide, the vital role that the public health nurse performs on the local public health level will be spelled out in more practical detail. No municipal health department or board of health can afford to be without a Public Health Nurse!

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