



Quick Reads

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Looking back and ahead

I have spent a great deal of time traveling throughout Iowa to meet public health leaders in the last year. With each visit, I am impressed with the dedication and integrity of our state's public health professionals. Our discussions have focused on the current needs of the public health system, as well as what lies ahead, and the possible transitions in light of the continuing impacts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The system change generated by the ACA means local public health agencies must be thinking about the future and IDPH must facilitate the transition as we work together in our ongoing effort to improve the health of all Iowans.

An example of the transitional nature of public health is the [West African Ebola](#) outbreak. An ancient disease that many had heard of, but few understood, has become an exercise in coordination and cooperation at every level of public health – international, national, state, and local, including hospitals and individual practitioners. Iowa has had no confirmed or suspected cases of Ebola, but much of the last half of this year has spent preparing for that possibility. The strong foundation of public health practice has served as the backbone upon which plans, procedures and protocols continue to be built. I'm proud of the work at all levels of the public health system as we respond to the West African Ebola outbreak and prepare for the unlikely scenario of a case being diagnosed in Iowa.

I wish you all a happy holiday season with family and friends and I look forward to the challenges and celebrations we will share in the coming New Year.

New faces

Several counties may experience a change in their Board of Health membership due to the November elections. Board of Supervisor members who also served on the Board of Health and were not re-elected, may not be re-appointed if the new Board of Supervisors wishes to appoint a new Board of Health member. I wish to thank those outgoing Board of Health members for your service and welcome new members.

I-STEP growing

IDPH's youth tobacco prevention program, [Iowa Students for Tobacco Education and Prevention](#) (I-STEP) continues to grow. I-STEP chapters must re-enroll in the program each school year. In 2013, the year ended with a total of 982 registered members in 51 chapters, representing 39 counties. Already in the first half of this school year, 803 members have registered in 44 chapters, representing 28 counties; 324 of these members are new. Of the 44 chapters, 22 are new to I-STEP and nine of the 28 counties are newly represented. There are 568 in 29 chapters who have until the school year to renew their membership in ISTEP this year. If these renewals occur, the 2014-2015 school year could see a substantial gain in students who are committed to preventing tobacco use among their peers.

Rural health day celebrated

By proclamation by Governor Branstad, and in collaboration with the federal [Health Resources and Services Administration](#) (HRSA), state, and local partners, [National Rural Health Day](#) in Iowa was celebrated last month. Activities included an awards luncheon at which exceptional health care leaders and professionals were honored. [Dr. Greg Cohen](#) of Lucas County and [Dr. Tom Evans](#) from the Iowa Healthcare Collaborative were among those honored as Rural Health Champions.

Congrats and kudos

Outgoing U.S. Senator Tom Harkin received the [American Public Health Association's](#) Public Health Legislator Award at the November annual meeting in New Orleans. [Iowa Public Health Association](#) Executive Director Jeneane Moody also was honored with the Council of Affiliates Award for Excellence.

The IDPH [I-Smile](#) program has been chosen by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to undergo an evaluation regarding innovations in oral health and prevention of dental disease. I-Smile is one of 12 promising models from across the country selected.

Linn County is the first community in Iowa to achieve all gold medals through [Let's Move! Cities, Towns and Counties](#) (LMCTC). LMCTC is a major component of First Lady Michelle Obama's comprehensive Let's Move! initiative, which is dedicated to ending the childhood obesity epidemic within a generation. Linn County is the first community in

Iowa to achieve a gold medal for each of the five LMCTC goals and one of only two counties in the country to earn all five gold medals.

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To everyone in public health and all our partners, keep up the great work!

— Gerd