



CURB THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH

"We have a real lack of trust with water. There's a lack of trust that government is going to do the right thing about it."

-Patrick, Flint

THE ROAD AHEAD

To help improve public health, Michigan must:



Keep kids safe from lead exposure.



Investigate child lead poisoning cases



Help local health departments respond to public health threats like PFAS and other environmental dangers.



TIME FOR A TUNE-UP

State spending on public health has not kept pace with growing health concerns, leaving Michigan ill-prepared to address current threats and future crises. In recent years, Michigan has maintained one of the nation's lowest per-capita spending levels on public health, even though the state ranks poorly with regard to a number of serious but preventable health conditions. Exposure to environmental hazards in our air, water and homes is a factor in Michiganders' poor health, leading to avoidable healthcare costs, premature death, lost opportunity and a lower quality of life for adults and children alike. We must give our local health departments and other entities the resources to prevent toxic exposures and respond effectively.



ABOUT THE OWNER'S MANUAL FOR MICHIGAN

We all agree Michigan needs a major tune-up. And like the real vehicles we all depend on, it takes a lot of components and tools to make our state go. Without good jobs and training, reliable healthcare, quality education, strong families, and a safe environment, our state can't run properly. That's why we've created a clear and comprehensive plan to help lawmakers on the road ahead—the Owner's Manual for Michigan.

REPAIRING THE PROBLEM:



HOW TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HEALTH

- 1. Continue to fund the Child Lead Exposure Elimination Commission:** In 2018, the Commission awarded more than \$757,000 in grants to a number of organizations, including local health departments (LHDs), for evidence-based pilot programs to perform universal blood testing and provide vulnerable families with a variety of services. Maintaining the Commission's current funding level in the coming budget year should be a priority in the state budget.

Because childhood is a crucial time for development of the brain and the rest of the body, exposure to toxins like lead is especially harmful during this period. The resulting physical health problems, cognitive impairments and academic challenges can affect children for the rest of their lives. Childhood lead poisoning is linked to an irreversible decline in IQ, a higher frequency of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, increased juvenile crime and a loss in lifetime earnings. Adults suffer from the impact of exposure, too: nationally, lead is linked to more than 400,000 deaths every year.

- 2. Provide funding to help local health departments investigate lead poisoning.** In budget year 2012, funding to states for lead poisoning prevention from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was cut by more than 90%, forcing many LHDs in Michigan to scale back elevated blood lead (EBL) investigations or discontinue them altogether. When a child has been poisoned by lead, an EBL investigation is crucial to identifying the source and preventing future poisonings in the same home. A dedicated state-level revenue stream for local EBL investigations would create a smoother process and ensure that all children affected by lead receive the attention they deserve no matter where they live.

- 3. Ensure reliable funding for response to PFAS and other harmful substances:** As the state is expected to continue discovering sites contaminated by PFAS and other pollutants are certain to come to light in the future, going forward it is important that this line item continues to be funded on an annual basis through the regular appropriations process. Supplementals may provide guaranteed funding for only a few months at a time, creating planning challenges for LHDs, requiring them to shuffle staff around and potentially creating discontinuity in response to environmental problems. Funding LHD response to these incidents on a yearly basis would improve efficiency and effectiveness in protecting the public.

SHARING THE ROAD

Equity is of utmost importance when it comes to building a better Michigan. Social and environmental factors affecting health, such as exposure to pollutants, vary drastically based on income, zip code, race and ethnicity. As a result, rural and urban residents experience worse health outcomes than their suburban counterparts, and even within the same community disease prevalence, mortality rates and life expectancy can be inconsistent from neighborhood to neighborhood. African Americans, Native Americans and Latinx people suffer from worse health overall than Whites and Asians. Through its impacts on education and employment opportunities, poor health is a key driver of intergenerational poverty and, consequently, avoidable government expenditures on healthcare and other services to meet people's basic needs. A robust public health sector is crucial to protecting all Michiganders from environmental threats to their health and well-being, regardless of race, place or income.

A project of the Michigan League for Public Policy

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