

New Governors, New Opportunities to Improve Health

Jill Rosenthal, MPH; Melissa Monbouquette

Because of term limits or retirements, 17 states had no incumbent nominee for governor in November 2018. In all, 20 states elected new governors and 8 saw a change in political party as well. More than 150 million Americans are beginning 2019 with new leadership presiding over the factors that influence their health, including education, housing, taxes, and economic development.

Governors are uniquely positioned to leverage state resources to address the conditions that affect health. By coordinating resources, advancing evidence-based health policies, and leading multisector coalitions, governors can advance their priorities, control costs, and improve lives. With more than 80% of health determined by social and economic conditions,¹ one way to improve health and lower health care costs is by improving education, transportation, housing, economic development, and other areas. Transition teams and new staff have been working hard to support governors in preparing initiatives in their states—and decisions made now will affect citizens for many years to come.

In partnership with the de Beaumont Foundation, the National Academy for State Health Policy released a new tool kit in December 2018 to help governors and their teams address upstream health issues.² The tool kit provides practical, real-world tools and strategies for agency leaders and governors to assist their residents in living long, healthy, and productive lives. While the tools were produced for governors and their senior staff, they can also help state and local health professionals effectively advance their priority issues.

Included in the tool kit are:

- A “Health in All Policies” chart³ (Figure) that explains the relationship between health and issues such as education, jobs, taxation, housing, and transportation, with links to resources for each area;

- An overview of what influences health;
- One-pagers on priority issues; and
- Tips on framing these issues for stakeholders and opinion leaders.

As a health professional and stakeholder, you can use these resources to support your state and local leaders in adopting upstream preventive policies. Especially if your state has a new governor, consider taking the following actions:

1. **Listen to what your governor has identified as his or her priorities and enlist natural allies.**

Is the governor focused on economic development and lowering unemployment? Or on improving education? What about emergency preparedness in the face of increasingly destructive natural disasters? These decisions impact the health of residents, and having a healthy population can also help a governor achieve other goals. Know who is working on the issues in your state and why adapting a health lens will benefit them as they start to develop and implement new policy priorities.

2. **Find new and innovative ways to explain why upstream policy interventions are effective strategies to improve health for constituents.**

Public health leaders too often rely on dry and outdated data to make their case. Identify ways to frame the message so that all partners can understand the problem—and the impact of the solution. Use clear and concise messages, infographics, powerful champions, and compelling stories to help others understand the issue—and to encourage bold action.

3. **Consider how you can support the governor’s senior staff, cabinets, and agency leadership in their efforts to make upstream health intervention a priority.**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to how states arrange their leadership and agency structures. Approaches to embed health across agencies can include statewide offices of health transformation, a governor’s advisor, or other entities embedded within existing health agencies. In whatever form it takes, an institutionalized priority to health will empower individuals or

Author Affiliations: National Academy for State Health Policy, Portland, Maine (Ms Rosenthal); and de Beaumont Foundation, Bethesda, Maryland (Ms Monbouquette).

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Correspondence: Jill Rosenthal, MPH, 7501 Wisconsin Ave, Ste 1310E, Bethesda, MD 20814 (jrosenthal@nashp.org).

Copyright © 2019 Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc. All rights reserved.

DOI: 10.1097/PHH.0000000000001006

HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES



 ISSUE:	 HOW IT RELATES TO HEALTH	 HOW TO MAKE THE CASE
Education	Long-term, high-quality education is linked to better lifelong health and healthier lifestyles, which can lower health care costs. Health is critical for learning and future success.	Evidence suggests that more education is associated with better health outcomes, which can translate into lower costs for state Medicaid budgets and lower commercial insurance premiums for state employees and others.
Jobs	A healthy workforce supports a thriving economy, and people who are healthy are more likely to find and keep jobs. Investments in healthy workplaces and communities can lower health care costs, improve safety, increase worker productivity, and support a high-performing workforce.	People who are healthy are more likely to find and hold jobs and pay state taxes.
Housing	It is difficult to improve health and control medical spending when people do not have a safe, stable place to live. Housing and supportive services can reduce avoidable hospital visits, control costs, and improve health. Supportive housing helps vulnerable families stay together and helps students stay in school. Keeping homes free of lead, mold, and pests helps people stay healthy and avoids costly emergency room visits.	Studies show housing and services can significantly reduce costs and hospital utilization. See Dept. of Housing and Urban Development’s Cityscape.
Transportation	Reliable transportation is important for physical health and a thriving economy. It enables people to work, visit the doctor, and shop for groceries. Safe places to walk and bike promote exercise and active living, which can help prevent and control costly chronic conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Low-emissions vehicles and public transit can improve air quality to help people breathe easier.	One study suggests that “complete streets” designed for walking, biking, cars, and public transit may be safer and tied to broader economic growth. States are pioneering legislation governing autonomous vehicles to ensure their safety while maximizing their potential.
Infant Mortality	Medical care alone cannot solve the problem of infant mortality. Newborns’ health is influenced by their families’ social and economic conditions, and state policies can help keep babies alive. States can promote evidence-based, low-tech interventions to address the leading causes of infant mortality.	Babies born to African-American parents are twice as likely to die as white babies. States can promote evidence-based, low-tech interventions to address the leading causes of infant mortality
Emergency Preparedness	Storms, wildfires, and drought caused loss of life and billions of dollars in damage in 2018. Tick- and mosquito-borne illnesses have tripled due to changing climate and other factors, and diseases that are preventable with vaccines are re-emerging. National health security depends on a robust public infrastructure that can help keep an emergency from becoming a disaster.	Weather-related disasters have caused loss of life and billions of dollars of damage, and the costs to states to prevent or respond to infectious diseases such as Zika are high.
Opioids	The opioid epidemic has social and financial implications for states, including spending on healthcare, social services, education, and criminal justice.	The opioid epidemic has social and financial implications for states, including spending on health care, social services, education, and criminal justice.
Budgets	Governors can help align agency priorities to help all residents live healthy, safe, and productive lives. People who are healthy are more likely to be able to find and hold jobs and pay state taxes, and helping people become and stay healthy can save state Medicaid programs money and stabilize commercial premiums.	People who are healthy are more likely to be able to find and hold jobs and pay state taxes
Taxes	State earned-income tax credits help improve the health of working people and their children, and help single mothers to return to work. States can tax unhealthy behaviors, such as tobacco use. State taxes can also incentivize cleaner air, energy efficiency, and other health-related policies.	People who are healthy are more likely to be able to find and hold jobs and pay state taxes.

SOURCE: Adapted from a chart in the “Upstream Health Priorities for New Governors” toolkit, created by the National Association of State Health Policy and the de Beaumont Foundation -- <https://nashp.org/toolkit-upstream-health-priorities-for-new-governors/>.

FIGURE Health in All Policies Chart

a team who can keep efforts on an efficient and effective path. Consider where the opportunities and barriers in your state might be.

The leadership changes of 2018 will have a significant and long-lasting impact on the health of communities, states, and our nation. Consider it a time of opportunity to engage new leaders and enlist new champions for public health.

References

1. National Conference of State Legislatures. State approaches to reducing health disparities. http://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/HTML_Large_Reports/HealthDisparity_1.htm. Accessed February 3, 2019.
2. National Academy for State Health Policy. Toolkit: upstream health priorities for new governors. <https://nashp.org/toolkit-upstream-health-priorities-for-new-governors>. Accessed February 3, 2019.
3. National Academy for State Health Policy/de Beaumont Foundation. Health in All Priorities. <https://nashp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Health-in-All-Priorities-Table-Jan-3-2019.pdf>. Accessed February 3, 2019.