



# Communicating about public health

Use de Beaumont’s research-tested talking points and communication tips to build your community’s public health literacy.

Every day, public health professionals across the country work to promote well-being in their communities – but most people have a limited understanding of public health. As a result, many don’t realize the many ways that public health initiatives have improved their lives. This lack of understanding may contribute to public distrust of organizations that are working to protect public health. To bridge this gap, public health professionals need language to explain how public health works – and how public health initiatives benefit people and communities.

## Build understanding of public health with these talking points

Based on research with more than 1,600 U.S. adults, the de Beaumont Foundation has identified **five big ideas** – concepts core to public health literacy – that many people don’t understand. You can use the research-based talking points below to help community members understand these big ideas.

**Big idea:** Public health works at the community level, while health care works at the individual level.

**Talking point:** While doctors and nurses care for individual patients, most public health workers care for the health of entire communities.

**Big idea:** Public health focuses on preventing people from getting sick or hurt.

**Talking point:** Because of public health, many serious diseases that were common in your parents’ or grandparents’ generations are now very rare in the United States. Public health workers take action to protect people from getting sick or hurt.

## Trust begins with understanding

When you interact with community members, you have opportunities to build **public health literacy** – to help people understand what public health is, what public health professionals do, and how that work affects their everyday lives and the lives of people they care about. Building that foundational understanding is essential to improving trust in public health and encouraging people to follow your organization’s guidance.

<b>Big idea:</b> Public health workers serve their local communities.	<b>Talking point:</b> Public health doesn't do just one thing. Instead, public health workers take many different actions in their communities to help protect people's health.
<b>Big idea:</b> Public health workers play a variety of professional roles – and many work behind the scenes.	<b>Talking point:</b> You may not always notice them, but public health workers include many people with different skills all working together to protect the community's health.
<b>Big idea:</b> Public health benefits everyone.	<b>Talking point:</b> Public health is based on the idea that everyone should have an equal chance to be as healthy and safe as possible. Public health workers aim to help every member of a community.

## Share why you care

What do you love about the field of public health? Why do you do the work you do? Sharing details about **why you care** can help to build an emotional connection and humanize what sometimes feels like an abstract field. And an emotional connection can make people more likely to engage with your messaging and understand why they should care about public health.

## Illustrate big ideas using specific examples

You can help people understand these ideas by adding **examples** of activities that public health professionals do to promote well-being in your community, such as:

- Inspecting shared resources – like pool, restaurant, or building inspections
- Providing health services – like health screenings, substance use counseling, or vision and hearing screenings
- Addressing environmental issues – like lead, pollution, or extreme heat

### Tip: Choosing examples

To catch people's attention, choose examples that align with:

- Your organization's work
- The situation in which you're communicating (like online or in person, in a large group or one-on-one)
- Your community's context (like recent news or health-related issues that community members care about)

Choosing examples that reflect people's real-life experiences in the community makes the work of public health **more relatable**.

This handout was adapted from **Communicating About Public Health: A Toolkit for Public Health Professionals**. To learn more, download the full toolkit.