



## III. LOCAL FOCUS AREAS

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### Local Health Departments

Maryland's 24 local health departments (LHDs) provide core public health functions of assessment, policy development and assurance to residents at the local level. These efforts are directed by a local health officer who is appointed by the elected officials in the jurisdiction, and approved by the State Health Secretary. The LHDs receive federal, state, and county funds through categorical, targeted, and other funding streams. Various grants from other sources may supplement these funds.

The 1989 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report entitled *The Future of Public Health* labeled local health departments "the critical components of the public health system that directly deliver public health services to citizens." Local health departments conduct a multitude of activities focused on preventive health care and health promotion. In many cases, local health departments provide direct clinical care in the areas of family planning, chronic disease care, mental health services and home health. For services that they don't deliver directly, LHDs become involved in the coordination of care through a network of local providers. LHDs are very active in community health assessment with an emphasis on improving access to services needed by the medically underserved.

Each local health department is organized into several units to accomplish selected functions. In addition to administrative services, the direct service divisions may include Disease Control, Food Control, Environmental Health, Addictions, Adult Health, Family Planning, Maternal and Child Health, Mental Health, Home Health Services, Community Health Education, Outreach, and School Health.

Maryland's 24 local health departments are at varying stages in their efforts to establish and promote involvement of their local communities in identifying health priorities and crafting strategic plans to address those priorities. The levels of readiness and outreach depend on the extent of the LHDs' available resources, especially staff with technical and planning expertise, as well as local political will and overall funding to support and promote such a process. The modules included in this Health Improvement Plan reflect these variations in local infrastructure, as well as, the LHD's readiness and interest in participating in the HIP development process. Many LHDs have programs and/or priorities that address relevant statewide priorities.