

# Georgia's State and Local Public Health System Supports Healthy Communities and a Strong Economy

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Georgia's state Department of Public Health, 18 public health districts and 159 county health departments work to prevent disease, injury and disability; promote health and well-being; and prepare for and respond to disasters. This fact sheet provides policymakers and advocates with a brief overview of public health and how it delivers a strong return on investment for the state. For more information on how the state and local public health system is funded, please read **this brief**.

## Health is more than what happens in the doctor's office

Public health and medical care are two distinct but inextricably linked systems that work best when they are coordinated.

| Public Health | Medical Care |
|---|---|
| Improves health community by community, such as when Georgia passed the Smokefree Air Act of 2005 to prohibit smoking inside most public spaces | Generally works to address health issues person by person, such as when a patient sees a doctor to get treated for lung cancer |
| Often requires collective action to achieve optimal outcomes; for example, about 80% of a community must get vaccinated against polio to protect the entire community from the spread of this disease | Often involves an individual patient and their health care providers |
| Focuses on preventing disease, injury and disability and promoting the conditions in which people can thrive | Outside of primary care, generally focuses on helping people who are already sick, injured or in crisis |

## Public health happens where Georgians live, work and play

According to one **definition**, "public health is what we do together as a society to ensure the conditions in which everyone can be healthy." Georgia's state and local public health system supports a diverse range of services and functions – from chronic disease and injury prevention to infectious disease control to environmental health services and much more.

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## Public health workers:

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| Inspect restaurants to help prevent the spread of foodborne illness and inspect public swimming pools to reduce health hazards | Collect and analyze timely data to detect disease outbreaks, monitor health trends, and inform decision-making | Connect pregnant people and infants to nutritional information, healthy food and breastfeeding support | Provide evaluations and coordinate services for young children with developmental delays |

**Spotlight on Georgia's Perinatal Home Visiting Program**

In FY 2024, the Georgia Department of Public Health launched a perinatal home visiting program to support pregnant or postpartum people and babies in rural communities. The program aims to improve birth outcomes, reduce preterm deliveries and decrease infant and maternal mortality. Leveraging about $6 million in mostly state funds along with additional federal funding, the program is expected to expand to about 115 counties in FY 2027. Since the program launched, thousands of home visits have been completed. During these visits pregnant or postpartum individuals and their babies receive a range of services and supports, from weight checks and mental health screenings to referrals for food assistance and tobacco cessation resources. Even in the program's short time, it has already demonstrated improvements for participants. For example, thanks to comprehensive education from her home visitor, one participant in a rural area recognized the severity of her preeclampsia symptoms and called emergency services. Her prompt action got her connected to care and resulted in positive outcomes for her and her baby.

*Georgia Department of Public Health. (2025, January 7). Perinatal home visitiing pilot program. [Written report on program implementation and effectiveness in compliance with statutory requirement in O.C.G.A. § 31-2A-19]*

### Public health saves lives and money

- The primary contributors to Americans living longer lives in the **20th** and **early 21st** centuries are rooted in public health interventions like improved sanitation, tobacco use prevention, family planning methods and widespread adoption of seat belts.
- Increases in public health spending have been linked to decreases in **preventable deaths**, reductions in infectious diseases like **sexually transmitted infections** and greater tracking of **foodborne illness**.

### Healthier communities support stronger economies

- Poor economic conditions play a role in **worsening health outcomes and rising mortality rates among working-age people.**
- Higher rates of diabetes, worse physical health, smoking and infrequent exercise are linked to **lower economic output per capita, lower labor force participation and lower median household income**.
- Conversely, stronger health within communities means people live longer, healthier lives with fewer sick days, **less productivity loss** and **more purchasing power**.

**On average, every $1 spent on public health**



**yields about $14 in savings across health services and the broader economy**

