

Next Steps in the Development of a Voluntary Credentialing System for New Hampshire's Local Health Officers



The New Hampshire Local Health Officers Standards and Workforce Competencies Advisory Committee recommends that the credentialing process for health officers be overseen by a voluntary board, under the auspices of the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The committee recommends the creation of the NH Local Health Officers Credentialing Board through the drafting of legislation and related administrative rules that will authorize NH DHHS to develop a process for the voluntary credentialing of local health officers.

The proposed makeup of NH Local Health Officers Credentialing Board is as follows:

- ◆ The Division of Public Health Services Health Officer Liaison
- ◆ The NH State Epidemiologist or his/her representative
- ◆ A representative of the NH Department of Environmental Services
- ◆ A representative of the Local Government Center
- ◆ Two representatives of the NH Health Officers Association
- ◆ A representative of the NH Public Health Association
- ◆ A representative of the University of New Hampshire's Master's of Public Health Program
- ◆ A representative of the Dartmouth Medical School's Master's of Public Health Program
- ◆ A representative of the Community Health Institute
- ◆ Four at-large members, chosen by the Commissioner of DHHS

The responsibilities of this oversight committee will include:

- ◆ Promoting and facilitating the attainment of voluntary credentials, and related training, by local health officers.
- ◆ Providing further definition for recommended training/training program content for health officers at each level.
- ◆ Developing the application process for credentialing health officers.
- ◆ Reviewing applications and determining whether credentialing requirements have been met.
- ◆ Recommending certification of those health officers who have met appropriate credentialing standards to the Commissioner of DHHS.
- ◆ Periodically examining credentialing requirements to assure that they are consistent with contemporary public health standards and concerns.

Training Recommendations for New Hampshire’s Local Health Officers: Building Blocks for a Voluntary Credentialing System

	Certified Health Officer: Level I	Certified Health Officer: Level II
Identifying Characteristics	The municipal health officer is the “traditional” local public health official that was established by State statute in the late 1800’s. The local health officer has specific, but limited statutory roles and responsibilities. As required by statute, each city and town has a designated health officer who must be appointed by the state.	In addition to the statutorily required work, some larger communities have expanded the work of the local health officer to include broader environmental health services such as food protection programs.
Legal Authority	Appointment: RSA 128 (for town health officers); Statutory authorities: RSA 5-C, RSA 127, RSA 128, RSA 141-C, RSA 147, RSA 170-E, RSA 236, RSA 485, RSA 485-C, RSA 595-B, RSA 676.	
Typical Programs and Services Provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child care, foster care, and other facility inspections required by state statute or regulation • Nuisance investigations, including failed septic systems and housing complaints. • Provides assistance to commissioner of DHHS in isolation and quarantine • Participates in local and regional public health emergency planning and response. • Involved in vector borne disease prevention (EEE, WNV, etc.) • Provides the general public with public health information and resources • Serves as local link to other public health services • Serves as town representative on public health matters • Responds to and/or provides support to NH Department of Environmental Services, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services and responds to state agency requests for local public health information and support. • Maintains local data base and provides general information on environmentally related disease concerns. 	<p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversees and conducts local food protection program • Conducts on-site sewage disposal plan reviews and installation inspections. • Investigates potential environmental hazards from chemicals, asbestos, and pests, etc. • Provides consultation to other municipalities.
Educational Preparation	Associate’s degree or equivalent	Bachelor’s or Master’s degree with science background or Master’s of Public Health
Job related Training	<p>Completion of training in the following topic areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core concepts of public health • Environmental health • Roles, responsibilities, and work of the NH Local Health Officer • Incident Command System training (per US Department of Homeland Security requirements) • Public health emergency preparedness • Use of technology required to support the work of the local health officer • Septic system failure evaluation 	<p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food protection and safety
Experience	One year of experience as a local health officer, or equivalent experience in a public health position with comparable responsibilities.	Two years of experience as a local health officer or environmental health specialist
Additional, Optional Certification / licensing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspection of on-site sewage disposal systems as required by state agent (e.g. state licensure as designer of on-site sewage disposal systems if health officer is also a local agent for DES inspections) • Hazardous materials awareness training 	<p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered Environmental Health Specialist certification