



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



Public Health

All Americans deserve a high-functioning, modern public health system that is capable of protecting them from everyday health threats like infectious diseases and exposure to second-hand smoke as well as less common, unsettling health emergencies like pandemic flu, bioterrorism or natural disasters.

We recognize the primacy of the public health system, with state and local public health departments at the system's core, in making our communities healthier places to live, work and play. This includes ensuring the safety of the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat, as well as advancing public policies to improve health, stimulating community involvement, triggering private action and changing, even inventing, systems of promoting and delivering the best health and health care to the most people.

In 2006 we focused on improving the performance and accountability of state and local public health departments. With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Foundation co-funded the Exploring Accreditation project, a first-of-its-kind initiative that brought together federal, state and local public health leaders to determine the viability of a voluntary national accreditation program, and if viable, its optimal structure. Exploring Accreditation is coordinated by the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the American Public Health Association, and the National Association of Local Boards of Health, in partnership with other stakeholders.

In September a 25-member steering committee released its accreditation recommendations, which are widely viewed as a groundbreaking development in public health. The recommendations propose that a nonprofit organization be established to oversee accreditation; call for the development of accreditation standards that promote continuous quality improvement, the pursuit of excellence, and accountability for the public's health; and suggest that initial financing for the program come from interested grantmakers, government agencies, and organizations of state and local health departments. An implementation plan will be developed in the coming year.

Other initiatives have contributed significantly to our ongoing efforts to increase knowledge about accreditation programs and define standards for public health agency performance. The Multistate Learning Collaborative, a partnership with the National Network of Public Health Institutes and the Public Health Leadership Society, seeks to gather and share important information about performance standards and accreditation efforts at individual state and

