

OFFICE OF COUNTY MAYOR GLENN JACOBS



MEDIA RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KCHD advances efforts to improve population health

Modifies leadership positions in line with national model

Knoxville, Tenn. – While this region has a wealth of attributes, such as its natural beauty, educational institutions, low cost of living, recreational opportunities and others, that set it apart from communities around the country, it continues to fall short when it comes to numerous health metrics. For example, the region has significant challenges with regards to chronic disease, substance misuse and mental health. A community's health status affects not just individuals and families but the community at large. In fact, according to the Nashville-based [Sycamore Institute](#), Tennessee's poor health costs the state billions of dollars each year.

"Our approach to improving population health as a community must continue to evolve. We can't just tell people to eat better and get more exercise, we need to be more intentional and strategic in focusing on the broad, upstream causes of our community's leading health issues," said Knox County Health Department (KCHD) Senior Director Dr. Martha Buchanan. "Given both the substantial human and economic costs of poor health, we must do more to make sure health has a seat at the table when important decisions are made in our community."

To create more capacity, the agency has recently modified two leadership positions. KCHD has repurposed its deputy director position to focus on operations. The previous deputy director, Mark Miller, has been named deputy senior director of operations. He oversees the agency's Information Technology and Finance divisions, the latter of which includes administration of more than 20 state and national grants, and a total annual budget of \$26 million. He also oversees the agency's Environmental Health division, which includes the food safety, groundwater and vector control programs as well as Air Quality Management.

In addition, KCHD promoted former Community Relations Director Katharine Killen to a new position, the deputy senior director of strategy. In this new capacity, Killen will oversee the agency's Organizational Planning and Development, Community Health and Communications divisions, which include approximately 55 employees. In her new role, Killen is tasked with advancing existing partner collaboration and developing new strategic partnerships to build an integrated and effective system that leads to healthier communities. In conjunction with Dr. Buchanan, Killen and her team will convene community stakeholders to raise awareness about the drivers of health, factors outside genetics that significantly contribute to our health. They will also work to demonstrate the well-documented connections between health, prosperity and public policy.

"We've long embraced our role as a chief health strategist for the community, serving everyone in Knox County, not just those who come to our offices, but we need to do more if we are to truly address our community's health challenges," added Buchanan.



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) report “Public Health 3.0, A Call to Action to Create a 21st Century Public Health Infrastructure,” released in 2016, provides guidance for health departments on how best to improve population health. The report calls for solutions outside of the health care system, including more broad-based actions at the community level. It urges renewed attention on the drivers of health, also referred to as the social determinants of health. The drivers of health include the social and economic environment, health behaviors, clinical care, and the physical environment. The report recommends local health departments focus on several themes, including strong leadership and workforce; strategic partnerships; and timely and locally relevant data, metrics and analytics.

While KCHD leadership will focus on the drivers of health and improving health at the community level, this approach will be implemented at every level in the organization through efforts such as staff training, partnership development and organizational strategic planning. As a part of this process, KCHD also tiered its other director-level positions to further increase capacity and improve efficiency. While this is not the first step KCHD has taken to advance the national Public Health 3.0 model, it is the most extensive. All changes have been made using existing funds and by repurposing positions.

“We are committed to serving our community through innovation, excellence and integrity, and that includes consistently reviewing our organization to identify how we can be more efficient and effective,” said Buchanan. “I’m excited about these changes, how they align with national best practices and public health accreditation, and how they will allow us to better serve our community.”

Current examples of KCHD’s work as a community health strategist include analyzing community-level health data and generating reports to share with the community. The best example of this is its [Community Health Assessment](#), an extensive report that outlines Knox County’s priority health issues. KCHD also serves as a convener and facilitator for community health improvement. Examples of this include the agency’s work with [All4Knox](#), a City-County initiative to create a communitywide strategic plan to reverse the substance misuse epidemic; the Data Roundtable, an annual gathering of community data keepers designed to improve data sharing and collaboration; and the Mental Health Task Force, a collaboration of all four local hospitals and health systems, large mental health care providers and mental health nonprofits to explore issues of access to mental health care.

About Knox County Health Department

The first health department in Tennessee to achieve national voluntary accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board, the Knox County Health Department is dedicated to ensuring the conditions in which every resident can be healthy. As a chief health strategist for the community and with approximately 260 employees, KCHD’s broad scope of work includes convening partners to improve community health, identifying community health threats, investigating disease outbreaks, conducting extensive outreach and education, preparing for public health emergencies, providing and connecting the public with medical care, enforcing food safety and air quality laws, and more. For more information, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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