KPHA Policy Paper 2008
Electronic Public Health Information Exchange

The Kentucky Public Health Association (KPHA) supports the development of electronic health information exchange systems for the purpose of improved health outcomes for individuals and communities. Health information must be recorded and stored electronically, rather than on paper, and an interoperable network based on common technological and clinical standards must exist to allow for the secure and timely access to health information. Adequate resources are needed to implement the needed computer science and technology applications. Systems should build on existing resources, such as immunization registries, and avoid duplication.

Public Health Information Exchange systems (public health informatics) basic goals are: 1) the promotion of a healthy population, 2) the prevention of disease or injury in a population, 3) the development of interventions to decrease the risk of disease or injury in a population, and 4) the functioning of public health within a framework of governmental legislative and regulatory directives (O'Carroll *et al*, 2003). Moving to an electronic public health information exchange will provide decision support for the public health workforce and the capacity for alerting and rapid communication for **i**mproved emergency preparedness and response.

To support an environment for Public Health Informatics there must be adoption of health information technology (HIT), data standards, and a process for health information exchange (HIE). This requires technology and the human resources with expertise in informatics to succeed. In 2005, the Kentucky legislature passed SB2 that called for the creation of a secure, interoperable statewide electronic health network. While many of the potential e-Health transactions or activities envisioned in SB2 relate to provision of medical care, many others support the practice of public health including chronic disease management; disease surveillance and reporting; health alert system and other applications related to homeland security; and registries for vital statistics, cancer, case management, immunizations, and other public health registries. The 2007 Kentucky eHealth Action Plan calls for inclusion of population and public health goals, including electronic disease surveillance, health outcomes and monitoring, and consumer health education efforts, as an integral part of an integrated e-Health network approach. The plan also recommends that representatives from public health sit on the Kentucky eHealth Network board and all of the committees.

The Kentucky Public Health Association calls upon the State Executive and Legislative Branches, all boards, administrators and staff of county and district health departments to place a high priority on the adoption of health information technology. Adequate funding for the technology and human resources needed to move to an electronic public health information environment should be identified without reducing funding for other essential public health services.