

“FUNCTIONAL REGIONALIZATION” AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Kansas’ public health system is decentralized, with 100 local public health departments that cover all 105 counties. Ten of those local health departments serve counties with more than 50,000 residents; 65 serve counties with less than 10,000 residents.

Along with the state’s rural composition, Kansas has long had a tradition of “home rule,” where local governments make their own laws that are not covered by state statute, or are more stringent than state laws. Local governments traditionally supply most of the funding to the public health system as well.

To ensure that all Kansas residents receive basic, essential public health services, Kansas health leaders have established an approach that allows local health departments to work together in small groups that provide those services.

Called “functional regionalization,” the approach allows counties to cooperate to provide those essential services. Members of the region remain county health departments but work together as a region to provide certain public health service functions that are not available within each member local health department.

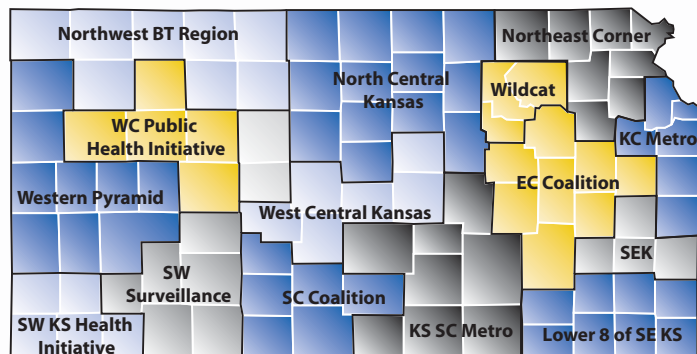
This collaborative approach, unlike consolidation, allows local governments to still have control over the services needed for their communities and how those services are delivered.

As public health standards and accreditation processes are developed, Kansas’ local health departments will be positioned to pursue accreditation through the public health regions, rather than as individual entities. Existing regional collaborations will be expanded from a grant-funded activity to an infrastructure development process. The regional approach will be of heightened importance to small, rural agencies with limited resources.

Public Health Regions

Public health departments have worked in regions to address preparedness since funding was established for those programs after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The functional regionalization concept gives counties the ability to pick their own partners under certain guidelines:

- Regions must include at least three contiguous counties;
- Members of each local department are represented within the group; and
- Inter-local agreements were signed to allow cooperation between counties in each region.



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