

# LA County Health Agency Integration Proposal

## PREVENTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH TALKING POINTS

### PREVENTION INSTITUTE AND THE COUNTY COALITION

- Prevention Institute is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to preventing illness and injury *in the first place*. Our work focuses on comprehensive and strategic approaches to improve the community conditions that contribute most significantly to health and well-being.
- We are a member of the County Coalition which represents leading public health, environmental, public policy, research, and evaluation organizations working collaboratively to improve Los Angeles and, as such, are opposed to the consolidation proposal in its current iteration.

### THE ISSUE

- We believe that the process for stakeholder and community input has not been adequate enough to ensure a broadly-informed and appropriate plan to consolidate the departments of Mental Health, Health Services, and Public Health.
- The process has raised many questions about the de-emphasis of population health within the County. It also exposed a fundamental devaluing of prevention and lack of understanding amongst County staff of the role of Public Health in the health system. A true health system prevents illness and injury at the population level, not just in service settings.
- These issues must be addressed and resolved if Los Angeles County is to ensure the health of the population, develop policies and practices to prevent disease and injuries, and promote conditions for good health for all.

### HEALTH HAPPENS IN COMMUNITIES

- We know that most health doesn't happen in the clinic or the hospital. Our neighborhoods, schools and workplaces have a far greater impact on our health and quality of life.
- Research indicates 70% of what determines our health is behavior and community conditions as opposed to 10% to 20% being determined by medical care.
- Neighborhoods are where we can make enormous impacts that improve health outcomes, lower demands on the health care system and prevent costly illness and injury *before they occur*.
- Public health is about ensuring that people live, work and play in safe and healthy neighborhoods and communities.

### LA COUNTY DESERVES AN INDEPENDENT AND ACCOUNTABLE PUBLIC HEALTH

- To combine three agencies with inherently different missions—two that focus on the individual's needs for clinical care, and a third—public health—that aims to promote collective health, puts public health at risk of being swallowed up.
- An organizational structure similar to the Health Agency structure currently proposed was in place prior to 2006 and essentially crippled public health, reducing its responsiveness and hobbling its prevention programs. We want to assure that the Board does not inadvertently recreate the pre-2006 harm in the name of consolidation and integration,.
- Establishing a separate and independent Department in 2006, resulted in the ability to recruit top talent and attract more funding, including federal support to Public Health - for a new state-

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of-the-art laboratory and funds to effectively mount and mobilize the largest flu vaccination campaign in L.A. history.

- An Independent Public Health Officer accountable directly to the Board of Supervisors is necessary to ensure public health is not compromised by bureaucratic barriers.
- We stand in support of better County coordination generally and health service integration, specifically. However, we believe that this must not happen in a way that risks the Public Health Department's countywide progress on community prevention. The current proposal does not provide specific assurances that Public Health can remain strong and visible.

## IT'S TIME TO BUILD ON IMPORTANT PREVENTION EFFORTS

- LA County should build upon the landmark achievements in community and population health made by its own Public Health Department.
- Millions of Los Angeles lives have been saved as a direct result of the Public Health Department's community prevention efforts – which are interventions that happen outside of the clinical setting, like implementing local tobacco use prevention policies; promoting healthy eating; and increasing access to quality and active public transportation.
- LA County's Department of Public Health brings in millions of dollars each year to ensure our food supply is free of contamination; prepare us for mass-scale threats to health like epidemics; prioritizes healthy food over junk food in our schools and neighborhoods; ensure people have safe places to walk, bike, and exercise; and create smoke-free workplaces and communities that prevent illness and suffering.
- The department's award-winning Parks After Dark (PAD) program has helped transform parks in communities with high levels of crime into welcoming places for families, who report feeling safe while attending. Since the program's inception, serious, violent crime in communities surrounding the parks has fallen 32%, compared to an 18% increase in nearby communities where the program didn't operate. This program saves lives, increases residents' activity level, and saves money. A 2014 study by the Department showed the PAD program saved County government \$460,000 in 2009.<sup>1</sup>

## PREVENTION WORKS AND MAKES "CENTS" – FACTS AND STATISTICS

- Partly as a result of these Public Health actions, rates for the County's top three leading causes of death have declined: 37% for coronary heart disease, 35% for stroke, and 22% for lung cancer. LA County also saw a 70% reduction in sedentary behavior from 2002 to 2011, and now has one of the lowest rates of smoking among large U.S. metropolitan areas.
- Since 2006, life expectancy in L.A. County has increased.
- Every \$1 spent on quality chronic disease prevention at the community level saves \$5.60 in healthcare costs.
- The Los Angeles Times has reported, *"...Brentwood residents live 12 years longer than Watts residents, and more than 30% of children in South L.A. and Boyle Heights are obese compared*

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<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. The Potential Costs and Health Benefits of Parks After Dark Rapid Health Impact Assessment, Executive Summary. September 2014.

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*with fewer than 12% in Brentwood.”* Adults in South L.A. are three times as likely to die from diabetes as those in West L.A., yet they have access to only half the park space.

### THE ASK

- While we fully recognize that LA County’s health system is undergoing transformation—just as most health systems are in the era of Affordable Care Act implementation—we seek a re-organization strategy that ensures attention to improving health through evidenced based public health strategies characterized by the following:
  - Comprehensive;
  - Community and equity focused;
  - Acknowledges the role of the environment;
  - Multidisciplinary and multi-sector participation;
  - Population-based rather than individually-oriented
  - Committed to prevention practice, not just intervention services;
  - Seized inter-relationships between prevention and treatment;
  - Balances services and programs with public health and community-based efforts;
  - Develops and strengthens a workforce skilled at community-based public health;
  - Advances health and equity in county-wide policy decisions; and,
  - Reduces barriers to interdisciplinary collaboration, including data and reporting.

### CALL TO ACTION

- All of L.A. County’s residents deserve to live in safe and healthy communities. This requires a commitment to promoting health and preventing illness—not just for patients, but for everyone.
- To the extent that the process to consolidate in LA County is approved, we seek a future where public health has a strong voice; prevention is well-funded; and decisions are guided by a broad-based vision for effective population-based, public health practice.