Public health is about protecting the health of an entire population. For us, that means all people who live, learn, work, or spend time in Cambridge.

Cambridge is a close-knit community of people of different races, ethnicities, cultures, languages, faiths, incomes, and lifestyles. To increase opportunities for all people to live healthy lives, the Cambridge Public Health Department provides services, analyzes and shares information, implements policies, and enforces regulations in ways that benefit everyone. After all, improving quality of life is what public health—and Cambridge—are all about.
Message | Chief Public Health Officer

Dear Friends,

Cambridge is moving toward a model in which local government and the community are genuine partners in improving health.

This spirit of collaboration is evidenced in our department’s 2015 City of Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan in which people from many different sectors came together to develop strategies to address the city’s major health needs.

It is also reflected in the actions of workers and residents who care deeply about the city’s most vulnerable residents. As one example, staff from the department of food and nutrition services for the Cambridge Public Schools secured funding this year to serve breakfast in the classroom to all students at an Area 4 elementary school, with the hope that no child would start the school day hungry.

Public health can have many roles in this collaborative model: leader, catalyst, facilitator, or participant, to name a few. Through strategic planning, workforce development, and branding initiatives completed this year, the Cambridge Public Health Department established a clear identity for itself as a city agency that works across traditional organizational lines to increase opportunities for all people in Cambridge to live healthy lives.

Read on for more stories about Cambridge and its journey to better health in 2015.

Claude Jacob
Chief Public Health Officer
Cambridge Health Alliance
City of Cambridge
Vision
The Cambridge Public Health Department is a leading, innovative, and model agency that facilitates optimal health and well-being for all who live, learn, work, and play in Cambridge.

Mission
The Cambridge Public Health Department improves the quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the city by preventing illness and injury; encouraging healthy behaviors; and ensuring safe and healthy environments.

Shared Values
Professionalism and Excellence
Innovation
Collaboration
Social Justice and Equity
The 2015 City of Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan is setting the city’s health agenda for the next five years. The plan describes goals, objectives, and strategies for making tangible progress in four health priority areas for the city:

- **Mental health and substance abuse**
- **Violence**
- **Healthy, safe, and affordable housing**
- **Healthy eating and active living**

Two additional topics—health access and health equity/social justice—are integrated across priority areas because they are the foundations of a healthy population.

The plan is the culmination of a two-year effort led by the Cambridge Public Health Department to involve the community, organizations, and local government in identifying the city’s major health needs and developing feasible solutions.

Following the publication of the CHIP report in May, the department hosted multi-agency meetings and gathered input from subject matter experts to develop the CHIP year one implementation plan.

As the following stories illustrate, the city’s health agenda is shining a light on pervasive issues that are widely misunderstood because of stigma.
Opioid addiction is a disease that can devastate the lives of users, and profoundly impact family, friends, and the broader community.

An estimated 1,256 Massachusetts residents died from unintentional opioid overdose in 2014, the highest number ever recorded in the state, according to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. In Cambridge, opioid-related hospitalizations increased 35% between 2007 and 2012, the most recent period for which data are available.1

Since the 1990s, Cambridge efforts have primarily focused on treatment and emergency services for people with opioid addiction disorder. Services include a needle exchange and overdose prevention program, hospital-based treatment programs, and emergency medical services.

More recently, city and community partners have been working on a broader response encompassing prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery. These efforts align with CHIP strategies to reduce opioid misuse and overdose, as well as the statewide opioid action plan.


These newer initiatives include:

- **OPEN** (Overdose Prevention and Education Network), a four-city coalition led by the health department, that is implementing regional prevention strategies, and sharing information and resources with the public.

- A surveillance system that will provide data on overdose “hotspots” and demographics of impacted groups in Cambridge, starting in 2016.

- A program to assist people in greatest need in navigating treatment and recovery services. Pro EMS, in partnership with city and hospital partners, is launching the Cambridge Recovery Coach Access Program in 2016.

- A free weekly *Learn to Cope* support group at Spaulding Hospital for people whose loved ones are addicted to opioids, alcohol, or other drugs. The group was established by the city in 2013.
Nearly every day, Cambridge police respond to reports of domestic violence, many of which involve current or past romantic partners.

“We haven’t seen an end to domestic violence in Cambridge, and we probably won’t. But we can address the issue head on,” said Mayor David Maher at the October reception for the city’s new Cambridge Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Prevention Initiative.

At the reception, the city released its first comprehensive domestic violence needs assessment in 20 years. The report synthesizes interviews with people at over 50 organizations, including human services agencies, law enforcement, courts, business associations, and hospitals.
Key insights and recommendations:

- More shelter beds and affordable housing are needed so that women and children in dangerous situations have a safe place to go.
- A streamlined network of culturally aware services are needed for survivors.
- Training should be available to organizations and residents on identifying signs of domestic and sexual abuse, and helping survivors.
- Children should receive information at a young age about respectful relationships to prevent future domestic violence.
- Improve organizational knowledge and sensitivity about domestic violence so that survivors and providers are less fearful about getting systems (e.g., housing, health care) involved.

The Community Health Improvement Plan’s domestic violence-related strategies will be informed by the report, as well as the city’s other domestic violence initiatives over the past two decades.
The health department offers the community an array of vital services. Some programs respond to urgent health matters, such as foodborne illness outbreaks and treating sick or injured children in the public schools. Others set the stage for a healthy life, such as the Let’s Talk! early literacy program and environmental health services that reduce hazards in the home.

In 2015, the department’s Healthy Smiles program provided free annual dental screenings to children at 18 preschools in Cambridge. Of the 417 preschoolers screened, 22% were referred for treatment.
To encourage summer reading, the Cambridge Book Bike delivered 2,600 books to families at five city parks in July and August. At these events, children also enjoyed stories, activities, and free lunch. Cambridge Book Bike is a collaboration of the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, Center for Families, and Cambridge Public Library.
Program Spotlight

Mental Health First Aid

From college suicides to people with mental health problems living on the streets, mental illness is a visible issue in Cambridge.

“We see people experiencing mental health problems on Mass. Ave., but we also see it in our friends, family, colleagues, and sometimes ourselves,” said Nancy Rihan Porter, coordinator of the health department’s Injury and Violence Prevention Program. “The question is, what can we do to reduce the stigma of mental illness so that more people will seek treatment?”

One answer is Mental Health First Aid.

Mental Health First Aid is a groundbreaking public education program that helps the community identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. The program recognizes that people with mental health problems are more likely to seek help if someone close to them suggests it.

In 2015, over 70 people completed the 12-hour training, facilitated by health and police department staff. Participants ranged from city employees and human service providers to university students and residents. In total, 145 people have completed the training since it was first offered in 2013.
Participants at an October Mental Health First Aid training at the health department were asked to guess where mental illness sat on the spectrum of disabling chronic conditions. The exercise was designed to raise awareness that mental illnesses can be more disabling than many chronic physical illnesses.
Policy, Planning & Advocacy

Biosafety
Climate Change Planning
Emergency Preparedness
Epidemiology
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Substance Abuse Prevention
Tobacco Policy
Violence Prevention

The health department develops policies and advocates for change to improve the health and well-being of all people in Cambridge. Activities in 2015 included implementing comprehensive changes to the city’s tobacco ordinance; promulgating a youth concussion regulation, addressing fluoride levels in city drinking water; advocating for a citywide urban agriculture policy; building a trauma-related community response network; and contributing to the city’s climate change planning efforts.

All Cambridge tot lots and smaller parks are smoke-free, as of June 1. Other changes to the city’s tobacco ordinance that took effect in 2015 include raising the purchase age of tobacco products and e-cigarettes to 21, and restrictions on the sale of cheap, flavored tobacco products.
The city decreased the target fluoride concentration in Cambridge drinking water by 30% in September. The health department made the recommendation based on federal guidance and published research indicating a reduced need for supplemental fluoride.
Policy Spotlight

Cambridge Youth Concussion Law

When it comes to concussion—a traumatic brain injury caused by a bump or blow to the head—young athletes are at risk. While most kids will feel better within a couple weeks, others may have long-lasting symptoms that affect how they think, act, learn, and feel.

While knowledge and awareness about concussion are increasing, recent studies suggest many young athletes do not report their concussion symptoms, continue to play with symptoms, or return to play too soon.

Massachusetts was one of first states to pass a sports-related head injury law. While the 2010 state law protects Cambridge students in grades 6–12 who play on school athletic teams, it does not extend to the thousands of city children who play on recreational leagues.

To address this gap, the Cambridge Public Health Department, the city’s human services and law departments, and city councillors worked together to develop a local law that would protect more children.

Promulgated as a public health regulation in 2015, the Cambridge concussion law covers children of all ages who participate in youth athletic programs—such as football and soccer leagues—that use city-owned facilities.

An important feature of the Cambridge concussion law is that it creates a channel of communication between recreational leagues and school nurses.

If a child receives a head injury during a youth soccer game, for example, the health department will share this information with the child’s school nurse and other school staff, with parental permission.

“Classroom and physical education teachers need this critical information in order to make appropriate accommodations so that the injured child can heal properly and avoid a repeat concussion,” said Barbara Meade, MS, RN, clinical manager of the health department’s School Health Program.
Cambridge Youth Flag Football is among the youth athletic programs covered by the Cambridge concussion law. *Photo by Seacia Pavao.*
The health department is a key source of timely, accurate, and credible information on health issues impacting the city. Through health marketing campaigns and other communication strategies, the department empowers residents to make healthy choices. In addition, the department seeks to engage the public in local health issues through citywide health fairs, community meetings, and annual events, such as National Public Health Week.
Social Media

Social media is rapidly changing the way people connect with others and find and share information online. For local health departments, social media can be an effective tool for reaching the community, building relationships with residents and partners, and sharing information.

This summer, the Cambridge Public Health Department launched Twitter accounts for Cambridge in Motion, a healthy eating and active living campaign, and OPEN, the Overdose Prevention & Education Network. The department also operates social media accounts for the Let’s Talk! early literacy program and Massachusetts Emergency Preparedness Region 4b.

### Accounts
- twitter.com/cambmotion
- twitter.com/LetsTalkCambMA
- facebook.com/LetsTalkCambMA
- twitter.com/MassRegion4b
- twitter.com/OPENCambridge

### Tweets of 2015

- **Cambridge in Motion** @CambMotion • Dec 1
  
  #participatorybudgeting proposal #12 would put water refills around #CambMA, making the free & healthy choice easy: bit.ly/PBwaterstations

- **OPEN** @OPENCambridge • Oct 28
  
  Last year the Needle Exchange reversed 151 overdoses…& distributed 194,569 sterile syringes. We love you guys!

- **Let’s Talk** @LetsTalkCambMA • Jul 29
  
  It’s a great day to #ReadWhereYouAre! Need a book? Go to @book_bike Hoyt Field 11:30-12:30 or @cambridgepl! #CambMA

- **Mass Region 4b** @MassRegion4b • Jul 20
  
  Some hot #tips from Region 4b: Limit time outdoors, drink lots of water & never leave kids or pets in a locked car [http://www.ready.gov/heat](http://www.ready.gov/heat)
By the Numbers

Health department programs touch the lives of many residents. Here is a data snapshot of services offered in 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48,068</td>
<td>Cambridge Public Schools student visits to school nurses for illness, injury, medication administration, and medical procedures during the 2014–2015 academic year. The School Health Program is operated by the Cambridge Public Health Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>Free flu shots administered at public flu clinics, homeless shelters, and other venues in fall 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,837</td>
<td>Cambridge school children (pre-K–4) screened for tooth decay by the Healthy Smiles program during the 2014–2015 academic year. Of these students, 24% were referred for treatment. The program also screened 417 preschoolers in 2015, of whom 22% were referred for treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>People who completed Mental Health First Aid training in 2015. The trainings were co-facilitated by health and police department staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>Communicable disease reports that required follow up by public health nursing and epidemiology staff in 2015.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,805</td>
<td>Patient visits to the Schipellite Chest Center at Cambridge Hospital for evaluation and treatment of latent and active tuberculosis in 2015. The Cambridge tuberculosis program is operated by the Cambridge Public Health Department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Men who participated in Men’s Health League programs in 2015. In addition, the annual Hoops ‘N’ Health sports tournament and health fair attracted approximately 600 people, including 200 players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,447</td>
<td>Books distributed to families and child care providers through Let’s Talk! in 2015. Staff also led 45 early literacy workshops for parents and caregivers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>132</td>
<td>Bartenders, waiters, managers, and owners of Cambridge establishments licensed to pour alcohol who completed the department’s 21 Proof training in 2015. The goal of the training is to reduce underage drinking in bars and restaurants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>Licenses and permits issued in 2015 related to laboratory biosafety, laboratory animals, indoor ice rinks, tanning salons, body art, bodywork, burials, and funeral directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>Home visits by Cambridge-Somerville Healthy Homes staff to families of children with asthma and elevated lead levels who reside in Cambridge and surrounding communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More Information

CPHD Governance, Responsibilities & Budget (2015)
www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications

2015 City of Cambridge Community Health Improvement Plan
www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications

Cambridge Health Indicators 2015
www.cambridgepublichealth.org/publications

Cambridge Public Health Department website
www.cambridgepublichealth.org
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Cambridge Public Health Department is a city department administered by Cambridge Health Alliance, a regional health care delivery system.