CHAPTER 251

LOCAL HEALTH OFFICIALS

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66.030(1) that specifies, in conformity with this chapter, all of the following:

(a) The powers and duties of the city–county health department.
(b) The powers and duties of the city–county board of health for the city–county health department.
(c) The relative powers and duties of the city and county with respect to governance of the city–county health department and the city–county board of health.

(1m) If a city that assigns represented employees to its city health department and if a county that assigns represented employees to its county health department jointly establish a city–county health department under an agreement specified under sub. (1m), all of the following shall apply, but only if the represented employees at the city health department and at the county health department who perform similar functions are included in collective bargaining units that are represented by the same representative:

(a) The city–county health department shall offer employment to all city and county employees who are represented employees and who perform functions for the city and county that are transferred to the city–county health department in the agreement under sub. (1m).
(b) Notwithstanding s. 111.70 (4) (d), if, in any collective bargaining unit that is initially created at the city–county health department, all of the former city and county employees were represented by the same representative when they were employed by the city or county, that representative shall become the initial representative of the employees in the collective bargaining unit without the necessity of filing a petition or conducting an election.
(c) Unless otherwise prohibited by law, with respect to city–county health department employees who were formerly represented employees at the city or county, the city–county health department shall adhere to the terms of the collective bargaining agreements that covered these employees while they were employed by the city or county until such time that the city–county health department and the representative of the employees have entered into a collective bargaining agreement.

(2) (a) Except as provided in par. (b), in a county with a population of 750,000 or more, the governing body of each city or village shall do one of the following:
1. Establish a local health department that meets the requirements of this chapter.
2. Contract with the local health department of another city or village in the county to have that local health department provide services in the city or village.
(b) In a county with a population of 750,000 or more, the governing body of a city or village may establish, jointly with the governing body of another city or village, that representative shall become the initial representative of the employees in the collective bargaining unit without the necessity of filing a petition or conducting an election.
(c) Unless otherwise prohibited by law, with respect to city–county health department employees who were formerly represented employees at the city or county, the city–county health department shall adhere to the terms of the collective bargaining agreements that covered these employees while they were employed by the city or county until such time that the city–county health department and the representative of the employees have entered into a collective bargaining agreement.

(2) (a) Except as provided in par. (b), in a county with a population of 750,000 or more, the governing body of each city or village shall do one of the following:
1. Establish a local health department that meets the requirements of this chapter.
2. Contract with the local health department of another city or village in the county to have that local health department provide services in the city or village.
(b) In a county with a population of 750,000 or more, the governing body of a city or village may establish, jointly with the governi
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A local board of health shall consist of not more than 9 members. At least 3 of these members shall be persons who are not elected officials or employees of the governing body that establishes the local health department and who have a demonstrated interest or competence in the field of public health or community health. In appointing the members who are not elected officials or employees, a good faith effort shall be made to appoint a registered nurse and a physician. Members of the local board of health shall reflect the diversity of the community. A county human services board under s. 46.23 (4) may act as a county board of health if the membership of the county human services board meets the qualifications specified in this subsection and if the county human services board is authorized to act in that capacity by the county board of supervisors. If a county human services board acts in this capacity, it shall use the word “health” in its title.

(2) The chief executive officer of a city or a village shall appoint members of a local board of health, subject to confirmation by the governing body. In a county with a county executive, the county executive shall appoint members of the county board of health, subject to confirmation by the county board of supervisors. In a county without a county executive, the county board of health may appoint members to be nonvoting members of the board.

(3) In establishing a city–county or multiple county health department, the governing body or a board of health for a local health department as authorized in s. 251.02 (2), shall elect a chairperson and clerk.

(4) A local board of health shall meet at least quarterly.

251.03 Local board of health; members. (1) A local board of health shall consist of not more than 9 members. At least 3 of these members shall be persons who are not elected officials or employees of the governing body that establishes the local health department and who have a demonstrated interest or competence in the field of public health or community health. In appointing the members who are not elected officials or employees, a good faith effort shall be made to appoint a registered nurse and a physician. Members of the local board of health shall reflect the diversity of the community. A county human services board under s. 46.23 (4) may act as a county board of health if the membership of the county human services board meets the qualifications specified in this subsection and if the county human services board is authorized to act in that capacity by the county board of supervisors. If a county human services board acts in this capacity, it shall use the word “health” in its title.

(2) The chief executive officer of a city or a village shall appoint members of a local board of health, subject to confirmation by the governing body. In a county with a county executive, the county executive shall appoint members of the county board of health, subject to confirmation by the county board of supervisors. In a county without a county executive, members of the county board of health shall elect a chairperson and clerk.

(3) In establishing a city–county or multiple county health department, the relevant governing bodies shall agree on how many members of the local board of health are appointed by each governing body and how many of each governing body’s appointees shall be members who are not elected officials or employees of the governing body. The members shall be appointed as specified in sub. (2).

(4) Governing bodies of counties, cities or villages that appoint local boards of health shall specify the lengths of terms of members and shall provide for staggered terms.

251.04 Local board of health; powers and duties. (1) Except as authorized in s. 251.02 (2), (3), and (3r), a city board of health shall govern a city health department, a county board of health shall govern a county health department or multiple county health department, and a city–county board of health shall govern a city–county health department. A board of health may contract or subcontract with a public or private entity to provide public health services. The contractor's staff shall meet the appropriate qualifications for positions in a Level I local health department.

(2) A city or county board of health or a board of health for a local health department as authorized in s. 251.02 (2), (3), or (3r) shall assure the enforcement of state public health statutes and public health rules of the department as prescribed for a Level I local health department. A local board of health may contract or subcontract with a public or private entity to provide public health services. The contractor’s staff shall meet the appropriate qualifications for positions in a Level I local health department.

(3) A city or county board of health or a board of health for a local health department as authorized in s. 251.02 (2), (3), or (3r) may adopt those regulations, for its own guidance and required by rule.

(4) A local board of health shall report to the department as required by rule.

(5) A local board of health shall meet at least quarterly.

(6) A local board of health shall:

(a) Assess public health needs and advocate for the provision of reasonable and necessary public health services.

(b) Develop policy and provide leadership that fosters local involvement and commitment, that emphasizes public health needs and that advocates for equitable distribution of public health resources and complementary private activities commensurate with public health needs.
A local board of health shall assure that measures are taken to provide an environment in which individuals can be healthy.

Unless the manner of employment is otherwise provided for by ordinance, a local board of health shall employ qualified public health professionals, including a public health nurse to conduct general public health nursing programs under the direction of the local board of health and in cooperation with the department, and may employ one or more sanitarians to conduct environmental programs and other public health programs not specifically designated by statute as functions of the public health nurse. The local board of health shall coordinate the activities of any sanitarian employed by the governing body of the jurisdiction that the local board of health serves. The local board of health is not required to employ different persons to perform these functions.

In counties with a single county health department and either a county executive or a county administrator, the county executive or county administrator may assume the powers and duties of a local board of health under this section. If a county executive or a county administrator elects to assume those powers and duties, the local board of health shall be only a policy-making body determining the broad outlines and principles governing the administration of the county health department.

A local health department shall meet the following requirements specified in par. (a) and may, unless sub. (6) applies, meet the following requirements specified in par. (b) or (c):

(a) As a Level I local health department, at least the level of services specified in sub. (2) (a) with a local health officer who at least meets the qualifications specified in s. 251.06 (1) (a).

(b) As a Level II local health department, at least the level of services specified in sub. (2) (b) with a local health officer who at least meets the qualifications specified in s. 251.06 (1) (b).

(c) As a Level III local health department, at least the level of services specified in sub. (2) (c) with a local health officer who at least meets the qualifications specified in s. 251.06 (1) (c).

(2) The services to be provided by the 3 levels of local health departments are as follows:

(a) A Level I local health department shall provide at least surveillance, investigation, control and prevention of communicable diseases, other disease prevention, health promotion and human health hazard control.

(b) A Level II local health department shall provide at least the services under par. (a) and additional services specified by the department by rule under s. 251.20 (3).

(c) A Level III local health department shall provide at least the services under par. (a) and additional services specified by the department by rule under s. 251.20 (3).

(3) A local health department shall:

(a) Regularly and systematically collect, assemble, analyze and make available information on the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs and epidemiologic and other studies of health problems.

(b) Develop public health policies and procedures for the community.

(c) Involve key policymakers and the general public in determining and developing a community health improvement plan that includes actions to implement the services and functions specified under s. 250.03 (1) (L).

(d) Submit data, as requested, to the local public health data system established by the department.

(e) Act as agent of the department, if designated by the secretary under s. 250.042 (1).

(4) Except as provided in sub. (6), a local health department is not required to provide the level of services that is specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c) or to have a local health officer who meets the qualifications specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c).

(5) Except as provided in sub. (6), the department may not require a local health department to provide the level of services that is specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c) or to have a local health officer who meets the qualifications specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c).

(6) A local health department may be required to provide the level of services that is specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c) if and only to the extent that these services and qualifications are funded from state and federal funds that are available and are additional to any funding available on January 1, 1994.


251.05 Local health department; levels of service; duties. (1) A local health department shall meet the following requirements specified in par. (a) and may, unless sub. (6) applies, meet the following requirements specified in par. (b) or (c):

(a) As a Level I local health department, at least the level of services specified in sub. (2) (a) with a local health officer who at least meets the qualifications specified in s. 251.06 (1) (a).

(b) As a Level II local health department, at least the level of services specified in sub. (2) (b) with a local health officer who at least meets the qualifications specified in s. 251.06 (1) (b).

(c) As a Level III local health department, at least the level of services specified in sub. (2) (c) with a local health officer who at least meets the qualifications specified in s. 251.06 (1) (c).

(2) The services to be provided by the 3 levels of local health departments are as follows:

(a) A Level I local health department shall provide at least surveillance, investigation, control and prevention of communicable diseases, other disease prevention, health promotion and human health hazard control.

(b) A Level II local health department shall provide at least the services under par. (a) and additional services specified by the department by rule under s. 251.20 (3).

(c) A Level III local health department shall provide at least the services under par. (a) and additional services specified by the department by rule under s. 251.20 (3).

(3) A local health department shall:

(a) Regularly and systematically collect, assemble, analyze and make available information on the health of the community, including statistics on health status, community health needs and epidemiologic and other studies of health problems.

(b) Develop public health policies and procedures for the community.

(c) Involve key policymakers and the general public in determining and developing a community health improvement plan that includes actions to implement the services and functions specified under s. 250.03 (1) (L).

(d) Submit data, as requested, to the local public health data system established by the department.

(e) Act as agent of the department, if designated by the secretary under s. 250.042 (1).

(4) Except as provided in sub. (6), a local health department is not required to provide the level of services that is specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c) or to have a local health officer who meets the qualifications specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c).

(5) Except as provided in sub. (6), the department may not require a local health department to provide the level of services that is specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c) or to have a local health officer who meets the qualifications specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c).

(6) A local health department may be required to provide the level of services that is specified in sub. (1) (b) or (c) if and only to the extent that these services and qualifications are funded from state and federal funds that are available and are additional to any funding available on January 1, 1994.

counts toward satisfying the requirements for education, training, instruction, or other experience to qualify as a public health officer if the applicant demonstrates to the satisfaction of the department that the education, training, instruction, or other experience that the applicant obtained in connection with his or her military service is substantially equivalent to the education, training, instruction, or other experience that is required to qualify as a public health officer.

(2) (a) Except as provided in pars. (b) and (c), a local health officer shall be a full-time employee of a local health department.

(b) A local health officer of a county health department in a county under s. 251.02 (3m) shall be a full-time employee of the county who meets the qualifications of a local health officer of a Level I local health department.

(c) A local health officer of a local health department of a village or town established under s. 251.02 (3m) or a local health officer of a multiple municipal local health department established under s. 251.02 (3r) shall be one of the following:

1. An employee of the local health department of the village or town or an employee of the multiple municipal local health department.

2. A full-time employee of a local health department other than that specified in subd. 1.

3. The local health officer under par. (b).

4. The employee of a hospital, who provides, on a full-time basis, the services under s. 251.05 (2) (a), (b) or (c).

(3) A local health officer shall:

(a) Administer the local health department in accordance with state statutes and rules.

(b) Enforce state public health statutes and rules.

(c) Enforce any regulations that the local board of health adopts and any ordinances that the relevant governing body enacts, if those regulations and ordinances are consistent with state public health statutes and rules.

(d) Administer all funds received by the local health department for public health programs.

(e) Appoint all necessary subordinate personnel, assure that they meet appropriate qualifications and have supervisory power over all subordinate personnel. Any public health nurses and sanitarians hired for the local health department shall meet any qualification requirements established in rules promulgated by the department. “Subordinate personnel” under this paragraph may include any of the following:

1. A public health educator who meets qualifications that the department shall specify by rule.

2. A public health nutritionist, who is a certified dietitian, as defined in s. 447.80 (1m), is credentialed as a registered dietitian by the Commission on Dietetic Registration, and meets qualifications that the department shall specify by rule.

3. A public health dental hygienist, who is licensed as a dental hygienist under s. 447.04 (2) (a) or (b), and who meets qualifications that the department shall specify by rule.

(f) Investigate and supervise the sanitary conditions of all premises within the jurisdictional area of the local health department.

(g) Have access to vital records and vital statistics from the register of deeds, as specified in ch. 69.

(h) Have charge of the local health department and perform the duties prescribed by the local board of health. The local health officer shall submit an annual report of the administration of the local health department to the local board of health.

(i) Promote the spread of information as to the causes, nature and prevention of prevalent diseases, and the preservation and improvement of health.

(4) (a) Except as provided in pars. (b) and (c), a local health officer shall be appointed in the same manner as are members of a local board of health under s. 251.03 (2).

(b) In any county with a county executive that has a single county health department, the county executive shall appoint and supervise the county health officer. The appointment is subject to confirmation by the county board unless the county board, by ordinance, elects to waive confirmation or unless the appointment is made under a civil service system competitive examination procedure established under s. 59.52 (8) or ch. 63. The county health officer appointed under this paragraph is subject only to the supervision of the county executive. In a county with such a county health officer, the local board of health shall have only a policy-making body determining the broad outlines and principles governing the administration of the county health department.

(c) A local health officer of a village or town health department established under s. 251.02 (3m), of a multiple municipal local health department established under s. 251.02 (2) (b) or (3), or of a city–county local health department established under s. 251.02 (3) shall be appointed by the local board of health.


Cross-reference: See also ch. DHS 139, Wis. adm. code.

This section does not require that a county create a stand-alone county health department and does not preclude the county human services director from exercising any managerial authority over the county health officer with respect to the operation of county health department programs. Because the transfer of the functions of a county health department to the county human services department is expressly authorized under s. 46.23 (3) (b) 1. bm. and c., a county that has a county executive is not required to create a stand-alone county health department. OAG 7-08.

251.07 Certain physicians; state agency status. A physician who is not an employee of the local health department and who provides services, without compensation, for those programs and services provided by a local health department that require medical oversight is, for the provision of the services he or she provides, a state agent of the department of health services for the purposes of ss. 165.25 (6), 893.82 (3), and 895.46.

History: 2007 a. 20 s. 9121 (6) (a); 2007 a. 130; 2009 a. 276.

251.08 Jurisdiction of local health department. The jurisdiction of the local health department shall extend to the entire area represented by the governing body of the county, city, village or town that established the local health department, except that the jurisdiction of a single or multiple county health department or of a city–county health department does not extend to cities, villages and towns that have local health departments. Cities, towns and villages having local health departments may by vote of their local boards of health determine to come under the jurisdiction of the county health department. No part of any expense incurred under this section by a county health department may be levied against any property within any city, village or town that has a local health department and that has not determined to come under the jurisdiction of the county health department.

History: 1993 a. 27 s. 213; 2001 a. 16.

251.09 Joint services. Local health departments jointly may provide health services as agreed upon under s. 66.0301, unless, notwithstanding s. 66.0301, the agreement conflicts with a provision of this chapter.

History: 1993 a. 27 s. 271; Stats. 1993 s. 251.09; 1999 a. 150 s. 672.

251.10 County health department, how financed. The county board shall appropriate funds for the operation of a single county health department that is established under s. 251.02 (1) and determine compensation of county health department employees. The local board of health shall annually prepare a budget of the proposed expenditures of the county health department for the ensuing fiscal year.

History: 1993 a. 27.

251.11 City–county health department and multiple county health department, how financed. (1) The local board of health of every multiple county health department established under s. 251.02 (3) and of every city–county health department established under s. 251.02 (1m) shall annually prepare a budget of its proposed expenditures for the ensuing fiscal year and determine the contribution from each participating county or city
in a manner agreed upon by the relevant governing bodies. A certified copy of the budget, which shall include a statement of the amount required from each county and city, shall be delivered to the county board of each participating county and to the mayor or city manager of each participating city. The appropriation to be made by each participating county board may, in establishing a multiple county health department, determine the compensation for the employees of the multiple county health department. The local board of health of a city−county health department established under s. 251.02 (1m) shall, under this section, determine the compensation for the employees of the city−county health department.


251.115 Multiple municipal local health department and city−city local health department; how financed.

The governing body of every multiple municipal local health department established under s. 251.02 (2) (b) or (3) and of every city−city local health department established under s. 251.02 (3l) shall annually prepare a budget of its proposed expenditures for the ensuing fiscal year and determine the contribution from each participating municipality in a manner agreed upon by the relevant governing bodies. A certified copy of the budget, which shall include a statement of the amount required from each municipality, shall be delivered to the governing body of each participating municipality. The appropriation to be made by each participating municipality shall be determined by the governing body of the city, village, and town.

History: 2015 a. 175; 2017 a. 6.

251.12 City health department, how financed. The common council shall appropriate funds for the operation of all the following:

(1) A city health department that is established as specified in s. 251.02 (1) and (2) (a).

(2) A multiple municipal local health department that is established as specified in s. 251.02 (3r).

(3) A multiple municipal local health department that is established as specified in s. 251.02 (2) (b).

(4) A city−city local health department that is established as specified in s. 251.02 (3l).

History: 1993 a. 27; 1999 a. 9; 2003 a. 158, 326.

251.125 Village health department, how financed. If a village health department is established under s. 251.02 (2) (a) or (3m), if a multiple municipal local health department is established as specified in s. 251.02 (3r), or if a multiple municipal local health department is established as specified in s. 251.02 (2) (b), the village board shall appropriate funds for the operation of the department.

History: 1993 a. 27; 1999 a. 9, 185; 2003 a. 158.

251.127 Town health department, how financed. If a town health department is established under s. 251.02 (3m) or if a multiple municipal local health department is established under s. 251.02 (3r) by the governing body of a town in concert with the governing body of another town or a city or village, the town board shall appropriate funds for the operation of the department.

History: 1993 a. 27; 1999 a. 9.

251.13 City−county health department and multiple county health department, joint funds. For each multiple county or city−county health department, a joint health department fund shall be created either in the treasurer’s office where the principal office of the health department is located or in the office of the city treasurer of a city within the health department’s jurisdiction, as determined by the local board of health. The treasurer of each county and city participating in the health department shall annually pay or cause to be paid into the fund the share of the county or city. This fund shall be expended by the treasurer in whose office the fund is kept in the manner prescribed by the local board of health pursuant to properly authenticated vouchers of the health department signed by the local health officer.

History: 1993 a. 27 s. 218.

251.135 Publication and effective date of orders and regulations. The orders and regulations of a local board of health shall be published as a class 1 notice, under ch. 985, and shall take effect immediately after publication. No local board of health is required to use the term “regulation” to refer to a regulation that is published under this section.

History: 1993 a. 27 s. 211; Stats. 1993 s. 251.135.

251.14 Gifts. A local board of health may receive gifts and donations for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this chapter.

History: 1993 a. 27 s. 215.

251.15 Withdrawal of counties, cities, villages, or towns. (1) After establishing a multiple county health department under s. 251.02 (3), any participating county board may withdraw by giving written notice to its county board of health and the county boards of all other participating counties, except that participating county boards may, in establishing a multiple county health department under s. 251.02 (3), establish an initial minimum participation period of up to 5 years. If a multiple county health department is established with an initial minimum participation period under this subsection, a participating county may not withdraw during that initial minimum period unless withdrawal is necessary to meet statutory requirements for a Level I health department under s. 251.05.

(2) A city that had established a local health department prior to deciding to participate in a city−county health department established under s. 251.02 (1m) may withdraw from the city−county health department if the common council of the city gives written notice to the county board of the participating county, except that participating cities and counties may, in establishing a city−county health department under s. 251.02 (1m), establish an initial minimum participation period of up to 5 years. If a city−county health department is established with an initial minimum participation period under this subsection, a participating city or county may not withdraw during that initial minimum period unless withdrawal is necessary to meet statutory requirements for a Level I health department under s. 251.05.

(2m) After establishing a multiple municipal local health department under s. 251.02 (2) (b) or (3) or a city−city local health department under s. 251.02 (3l), the governing body of any participating city, village, or town participating may withdraw by giving written notice to the local board of health and to the governing bodies of all other participating cities, villages, and towns, except that participating cities, villages, and towns may, in establishing a multiple municipal local health department under s. 251.02 (2) (b) or (3) or a city−city local health department under s. 251.02 (3m), establish an initial minimum participation period of up to 5 years. If a multiple municipal local health department or city−city local health department is established with an initial minimum participation period under this subsection, a participating city, village, or town may not withdraw during that initial minimum period unless withdrawal is necessary to meet statutory requirements for a Level I health department under s. 251.05.

(3) The notice under sub. (1), (2), or (2m) shall be given at least one year prior to commencement of the fiscal year at which the withdrawal takes effect. Whenever the withdrawal takes effect, all relevant provisions of law relating to local boards of health and local health officers shall immediately become applicable within the withdrawing county, city, village, or town.

251.16 Local health department; evidence. The reports and employees of a local health department are subject to s. 970.03 (12) (b).

History: 1979 c. 221; 1985 a. 267 s. 3; 1993 a. 27 s. 221; Stats. 1993 s. 251.16.

251.20 Rule making. The department shall promulgate rules that specify all of the following:

1. Required services for each of Levels I, II and III local health departments under s. 251.05 (2).

2. Additional required services for Level II and Level III local health departments under s. 251.05 (2) (b) and (c), including services that the department of health services determines appropriately address objectives or services specified in the most recent public health agenda under s. 250.07 (1) (a).


Cross-reference: See also ch. DHS 140, Wis. adm. code.