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10 Year Cross-Jurisdictional Shared Services Relationship

The Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments (GO Health) are celebrating 10 years of working collaboratively through their cross-jurisdictional shared services arrangement. This initiative was the first of its kind in New York State and is at the forefront of providing best practices for local governments looking to become more efficient through sharing services.

The shared services began as a PILOT project for two years and was part of a national initiative funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that helped establish the Center of Sharing Public Health Services (www.phsharing.org). Following the first two years, the benefits, both fiscally and operationally have resulted in an ongoing agreement by Genesee and Orleans Counties to continue forward with sharing public health services.

“The Genesee County Legislature saw this collaboration as an opportunity for our residents to be served by high quality staff, which is key to improving the quality of healthy living in Genesee and Orleans Counties,” stated Shelley Stein, Genesee County Legislative Chair. “Since the beginning of this venture, both counties have made significant progress and now have shared services with the Youth Bureau and Weights and Measures. These shared services reduce local taxes and lower cost of governments. Additionally, across New York State our best practices and case studies have been studied by other counties seeking to cut costs for their residents.”

“The cross-jurisdictional collaboration to create the shared Genesee and Orleans County Health Departments, now known as GO Health, was a transforming idea of two legislative bodies,” stated Lynne Johnson, Orleans County Legislative Chair. “This would not have been achieved if it weren’t for the faith we had in Public Health Director, Paul Pettit to lead the initiative.”

The support and technical assistance of the Center for Sharing Public Health Services for our integrated health departments helped identify the value for our leaders and provide the financial support to jump-start the collaboration. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) also added their support to the pilot project of joining resources, which lead to the benefit of residents in both of our counties, and is key to our ongoing success.

Working together has helped fill workforce gaps, provide natural redundancy and attract additional candidates for vacant positions. The public health staff in both counties have become more creative and have worked together on several joint projects, including, but not limited to, a joint strategic plan, workforce development plan, quality improvement, branding and communication plan, and working on a joint application to become nationally accredited through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) as GO Health.

This collaboration has also seen an increase in the services we are able to offer our residents due to the ability to be more competitive with grant applications with a combined population of almost 100,000 residents. GO Health has been very successful in applying for and receiving approximately \$7,500,000 dollars in grant funds since we began joint applications 10 years ago. These funds have helped to reduce county costs while enhancing services to county residents. GO Health has regionalized service delivery further and is also the recipient of a Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Lead Poisoning Prevention and Remediation grant in collaboration with Wyoming and Livingston Counties (GLOW region). These lead grants are going to assist residents to reduce lead poisoning and remediate hazards in their homes. GO Health has also benefited from three CDC Public Health Associate Program fellows that spend a two-year assignment working in both counties at little cost to the counties.

“Seeing all that we have accomplished over the past 10 years shows that our initial goals were on target,” stated Paul Pettit, Public Health Director of GO Health. “We continue to look at innovative ways to advance our collaboration, drive efficiencies, and be fiscally responsible. Where we are today with our integrated operations is a testament to the buy in and hard work of our county administration, the GO Health leadership team, and all the public health staff. The staff have been instrumental in the success of our work as they operate as a team, share ideas, deliver services, and promote health as a cohesive unit.”

The COVID-19 pandemic response put our integrated departments to the test. Having the ability to work together through sharing employees helped balance the surges over the past couple of years and was essential to meet the needs of contact tracing, administering COVID-19 testing and eventually vaccinations in both counties. One of the most effective benefits of our shared response was with public communications and messaging which allowed us to reduce redundancies and leverage staffing to push information across our shared media.

“We recognize our public health staff for their hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic and over the past 10 years,” stated Mrs. Johnson. “We look forward to seeing what they can accomplish in the years to come.”

“Throughout the pandemic, I was able to volunteer my time at clinics and experience firsthand how caring and committed our health department staff are,” stated Mrs. Stein. “Watching folks mature into highly functioning teams with only one goal – serve and care for the health and recovery of our residents. I am in awe of the dedication to public service that was very evident in each member of GO Health each day. They are a true gift to our communities. The GO Health partnership gives us the opportunity for health specialists here at home to be comparable with urban counties. I am grateful to know them. Our shining stars!”

“Looking forward, we expect to see GO Health continue to mature and provide further savings and enhanced service delivery to our residents,” stated Mr. Pettit, “GO Health is in the final stages of becoming a nationally accredited health department, which is planned for mid-2023. GO Health will continue to integrate and serve as chief health strategists in our communities. We look forward to serving both counties as GO Health-onward.”

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