

Death Investigations and Public Health: Where's the Connection?

Tom Newton, Director
Iowa Department of Public Health



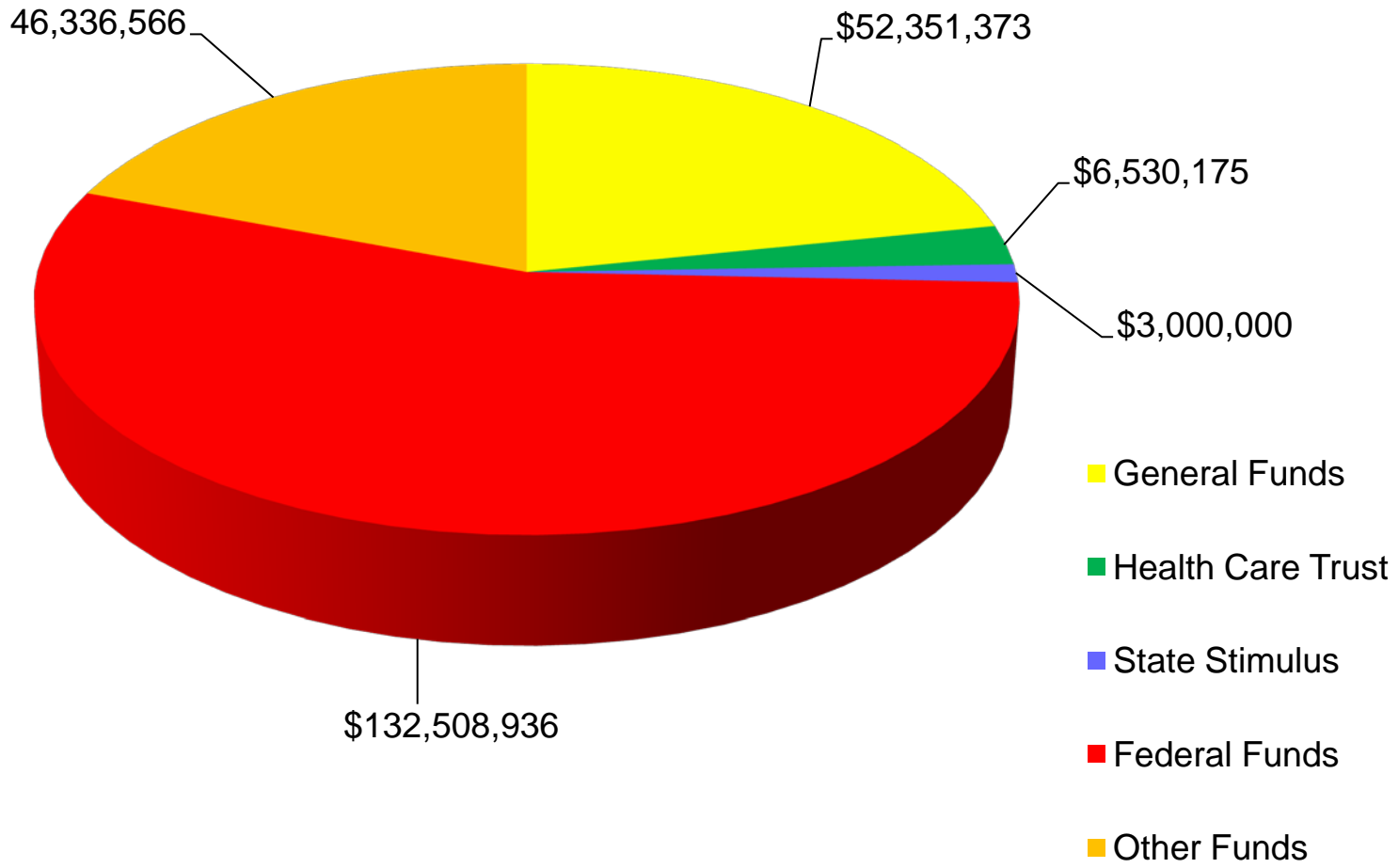
IDPH Quick Facts

- Approximately 450 employees
- 180 programs
- 6 divisions
- 19 professional licensing boards
- 4 “semi-independent” boards (medicine, pharmacy, nursing, and dental)
- Celebrated 125 year anniversary in 2005

IDPH's Divisions

- Administration and Professional Licensure
- Acute Disease Prevention and Emergency Response
- Behavioral Health
- Environmental Health
- Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention
- Tobacco Use Prevention and Control

IDPH FY 2010 Budget



Iowa's Public Health System

- Decentralized like other governmental functions in the state
- 100 locals boards of health
- LBOH – 5 member boards, one of which must be a licensed physician
- Approximately 1/3 of local health departments are hospital based
- Service delivery at local level with support from state (funding, policy, TA...)

What does public health do?

Definition of public health #1:

"the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities and individuals..."

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_health

What does public health do?

Definition of public health #2:

“The science and practice of community hygiene; includes preventive medicine, health education, sanitation and environmental safety.”

en.wiktionary.org/wiki/public_health

What does public health do?

Definition of public health #3:

“an effort organized by society to protect, promote, and restore the people’s health. Physicians treat one patient at a time; public health workers treat whole populations.”

[http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthexperts/
Glossary.htm](http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthexperts/Glossary.htm)

Public Health in America

Public Health:

- Prevents epidemics and the spread of disease
- Protects against environmental hazards
- Prevents injuries
- Promotes and encourages healthy behaviors
- Responds to disasters and assists communities in recovery
- Assures the quality and accessibility of health services

Ten Essential Services

- 1) Monitor health status of the community
- 2) Diagnose and investigate health problems
- 3) Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
- 4) Mobilize community partnerships and action to solve health problems
- 5) Develop policies and plans that support community health efforts

Ten Essential Services

- 6) Enforce laws and regulations
- 7) Link people to needed personal health services
- 8) Assure competent public and personal health workforce
- 9) Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services
- 10) Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

Monitor Health Status...

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Play a critical role in assuring accurate reporting of vital statistics
- Actively participate in public health surveillance
- Assist in identifying threats to community health and/or specific groups within the community

Monitor Health Status...

Examples:

- Identification of a possible pattern of deaths among young children – worked closely w/epidemiologists to assess data
- FACE project – collaboration among IOSME, IDPH epidemiologists, and University of Iowa College of Public Health to investigate worksite fatalities
- Child Death Review Team

Diagnose and Investigate...

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Contribute to the body of knowledge about patterns of infectious and chronic disease and injuries
- Work with other public health partners to investigate individual deaths which may be an indicator of a risk to the community

Diagnose and Investigate...

Examples:

- FACE project – worksite fatalities
- IOSME has worked closely with IDPH toxicologist to analyze data and determine risk
- H1N1 and other infectious disease reporting – epidemiologists and UHL
- Child Death Review Team

Inform, Educate, and Empower...

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Educate public health practitioners, policy makers and law enforcement about causes and patterns of deaths
- Often called upon to work through the media to get out messages to protect the public's health

Inform, Educate, and Empower...

Examples:

- Contribution to the *Vital Statistics of Iowa* and *Child Death Review Team Annual Report* publications
- Criminal testimony on causes and manners of death
- FACE project – worksite fatality reports

Develop Policies and Plans...

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Assist in disaster planning around mass casualties
- Contribute to code and rule changes related to death reporting and certificates
- Determine when a death investigation and autopsy are appropriate as well as reporting forms used

Develop Policies and Plans...

Examples:

- IOSME assumed lead role in drafting Iowa's mass casualty plan
- IOSME routinely works with Bureau of Health Statistics on rule and code changes related to death reporting
- IOSME responsible for updating Iowa Code Chapter 331, IAC 641-126, and IAC 641-127

Enforce Laws and Regulations...

IOSME and county medical examiners:

- Provide information that could be used to determine whether a company was not following workplace safety rules
- Play critical role in collecting evidence related to criminal cases and expert testimony

Enforce Laws and Regulations...

Examples:

- Work closely with law enforcement related to wrongful death cases
- FACE reports – used to inform policy and in some cases enforce rules and laws
- Death reporting and investigation (Iowa Code Chapter 331, IAC 641-126 and 641-127)

Assure a Competent...Workforce

Examples:

- IAC 641-127 “County Medical Examiners”
- Ongoing training provided by IOSME and Coverdale funding
- Annual conference

Evaluate Effectiveness...

Examples:

- National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) accreditation
- State performance measurement efforts

Concluding Thoughts

- Death investigations fit within the public health model
- IOSME and CMEs play a vital role in protecting the health of lowans
- Potential for future collaborations between traditional public health programs and death investigators as both sides become more aware of what the other does

Thank you!

