

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: January 15, 2021

To: Sup. Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Director, Department of Health and Human Services and
Cassandra Libal, Director, Office of Emergency Management

Subject: **Report from the Director, Department of Health and Human Services, and
Director, Office of Emergency Management, providing an update on the options
for implementing a countywide health department**

Issue

On September 24, 2020, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors adopted File No. 20-540 which requested Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) explore options to create a countywide health department. The purpose of which is to establish a centralized and uniform department to enable Milwaukee County's local health leaders to convene together to coordinate public health responses, consolidate services, and eliminate health disparities among communities.

Background

In May 2019, Milwaukee County declared racism as a public health crisis (File No. 19-397) and vowed to advocate for relevant policies that improve the health in communities of color, and support local, state and federal initiatives. The County's goal of making Milwaukee County the healthiest county in Wisconsin will only be fulfilled if longstanding racial disparities in public health outcomes are addressed; this is another motivating factor for a review of the county's public health infrastructure and how it can be fortified going forward.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the limitations of the current local public health infrastructure. Municipalities in Milwaukee County have approximately 11 health departments and provide services for 951,448 residents. Although the County and local health departments have found temporary approaches to collaborate amidst the pandemic, significant challenges remain in regard to strategic alignment, decision-making authority, funding, and coordination.

Discussion

The Wisconsin Policy Forum, in partnership with the University Wisconsin-Madison Population Health Institute, will conduct research and facilitation of this project. The research team will explore four key questions:

- How do other metro areas address racial health disparities and does their performance in this area provide clues to potential structural changes here?
- Are there coordinated county-municipal-private sector public health models from other metro areas that might provide worthwhile ideas for Milwaukee County?
- Is there a need for a permanent unified approach to public health in Milwaukee County to coordinate programming, planning, data collection; set common standards & priorities; and improve health equity and health improvement? What range of options exists for such an approach?
- Is there a need for better and more formalized coordination and collaboration between public sector public health agencies and private health care providers and institutions?

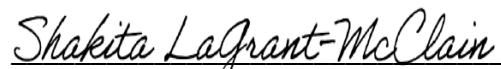
The deliverable from the research team will be a comprehensive written report that will:

- Assess the current municipal and county public health landscape in Milwaukee County
- Compare and contrast the county's public health framework with those of 4-6 peer counties, to be selected based on similar demographics and comparable health and racial equity and inequity profiles
- Develop policy options and recommendations on strategies to improve public health coordination, administration, governance, and outcomes in Milwaukee County based on the input of community stakeholders

The consultants will be conducting their research throughout the spring and summer of 2021 and we will provide further progress updates in the coming months.

Recommendation

This report is informational and no action is required.


Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Director
Department of Health and Human Services


Cassandra Libal, Director
Office of Emergency Management

Milwaukee County Public Health Department

January 15, 2021

3 | Page

cc: County Executive David Crowley
Sup. Jason Haas, Chair, Finance Committee
Chair, Health & Human Needs Committee
Mary Jo Meyers, County Executive's Office
Julie Landry, DAS Director
Kelly Bablitch, County Board
Steve Cady, Research and Policy Director – Comptroller's Office
Pam Matthews, Budget Analyst - DAS