

2024 Highlights Summary

Reflecting on 2024, it was a remarkable and productive year at Public Health. We set records by losing only one permanent full-time employee and welcoming five new team members. Notably, we added a Director of Environmental Health, which significantly enhanced the oversight of that division.

The creation and implementation of our agency's Strategic Plan provided a valuable roadmap for improving how we operate both internally and the programs and services we offer to the community. Building off our 2023 theme of “Reset. Renew. Reimagine,” we achieved many notable milestones. For instance, we can now accept credit card payments online, and instituted electronic forms, making our services more accessible through technology.

Our Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement Program led numerous initiatives, including additional program auditing, project improvement, and the creation and update of internal work procedures. Other key highlights include updates to both the Tioga County Sanitary Code and the Environmental Fee schedule, the first updates in over 20 years.

Public Health assumed leadership of the Advocacy, Support, And Prevention Coalition (ASAP), managing grant funds and workplans for substance abuse and misuse prevention. Through our own Opioid Overdose Prevention Program and the work of these grants and Coalition, we have trained and distributed Narcan to hundreds, added additional locations for Public Access Narcan (PAN) boxes, a NY Matters vending machine, created several commercials, and launched various forms of advertising in the community.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the Board of Health order deeming the Foundry/Tioga Castings site uninhabitable due to soil safety concerns. This several-month-long process affected our department in numerous ways and required cooperation from several partners and the community. We express our sincere gratitude to everyone involved in this initiative, helping us carry out our mission to protect the health and safety of those affected.

As we look to the coming year, we will continue to focus on ensuring we have a strong, dedicated workforce committed to providing quality programs and services to meet the needs of our community. Key highlights include:

- Only lost one permanent Full-Time employee, while we had four internal promotions, (including the creating of Director of Environmental Health) and gained five new full-time employees.
- Board of Health order was issued that deemed the Foundry/Tioga Castings site uninhabitable due to the safety concerns of the soil. This was a several month-long process that affected our department in numerous ways and required cooperation from several partners and the community. Department was commended for our leadership in the way it was handled being recognized by our community, local officials, NYSACHO, NYSDOH and other counties.

- Agency Strategic Plan in full swing. Every employee has a hand in its implementation. Several milestones were successfully completed, and others are still in progress:
 - Creation of materials to demonstrate the public health value of what we do for taxpayers
 - A public health services assessment and analysis was completed, to determine what public health services are needed in our community
 - Continued to utilize technology to improve access to services/programs; as seen through accepting on-line credit card payments and creation of electronic forms
 - Employee satisfaction assessment and action plan completed
 - Workforce training needs assessment and plan completed
 - Met with over 23 partners to renew partnerships and focus on collaborations that can best support the community
- Quality Assurance/Improvement Program was fully re-instated and four full quarters of audits were completed; includes several programs and hundreds of chart audits. Also includes Quality Improvement projects such as Rabies Program Improvement; outcomes include updated Rabies bite investigation form, on-line bite form, and prophylaxis tracking procedure. Additional on-going projects include Dental Security Updates, and electronic forms.
- We can now accept on-line payments through (MuniciPay) in all applicable program areas and purchased an application (Cognito Forms) that has allowed us to create online electronic forms for public use and to streamline processes (i.e. Dental Van Enrollment Form was created and is being successfully utilized, and Environmental Health Services Forms are in progress).

Successes

- We completed all our 2024 goals! In review, they were:
 - Retain current workforce through engagement satisfaction activities, and enhanced training opportunities.
 - Complete an assessment of what public health services are needed in the community and implement priority programs, including utilization of our new “Public Health on the Go” mobile trailer.
 - Provide greater access to public health services/programs by leveraging technology; to specifically accept credit card payments and Environmental Health Permits on-line.
 - Continue to expand the Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement program to include additional program auditing, project improvement, and creation/update of work procedures.
- CLIA reinstated (clinical laboratory license) that will allow us to perform lab tests in the clinic, expanding services we provide.
- Our School Based Dental program conducted nearly 1,000 visits; more than doubling what we had in 2023.

- March/April-we began the transition of ASAP Coalition, grant funds and workplans for substance abuse/misuse to our department. This is a collaboration with Mental Hygiene. Through our own Opioid Overdose Prevention Program and the work of these grants and Coalition we have distributed/trained hundreds in Narcan, added additional locations for PAN boxes, created a handful of commercials and many other forms of advertising.
- Tioga County Sanitary Code was updated for the first time in 20 years; along with the Environmental Health fee schedule which was updated after a thorough assessment, and passage of local law.
- Covid After Action Report completed and presented to staff, Board of Health and distributed to key stakeholders.
- Cradle Point was finally installed onto the Mobile Dental Van, after several months of hurdles, which allows for better internet/phone connection throughout Tioga County.
- Convened Welcome Baby Outreach; the calling of new moms in Tioga County. We updated and started sending “Happy Birthday” post cards for children turning one.
- We took ownership of and purchased a trailer for storage on the go, specifically for Rabies Clinics, new XRF analyzer for the lead program and a new freezer for vaccine storage; as well as purchased new vehicles to upgrade our fleet, and computers for staff.
- Partnered with Southern Tier Aids Program to get a NY Matters vending machine at The Red door in Waverly that dispenses Narcan and Fentanyl testing strips.
- Our Dental Van had a visit from program evaluators from Eastern Tennessee University and will be highlighted as a successful case study, sometime in the next year.
- We were awarded/received a handful of grants:
 - NYSACHO (New York Association of County Health Officials) Climate Change,
 - MRC Strong (Medical Reserve Corps)
 - Floyd Hooker Foundation to fund a project titled “Tioga County Lead-Free Homes for Children,” to support activities aimed at reducing the hazards of lead paint
 - CFRT/BCHD on Rail safety
 - Public Health Infrastructure Grant (PHIG)- year 2 went well providing many things for staff toward the goal of recruitment, retention and development.
- Presented and shared our work at:
 - New York State Rural Health Symposium in Binghamton, which included posters on the Tioga Mobile Dental Program and Wellhead Program
 - New York State Cancer Consortium meeting about Tioga County’s adoption of Sun Safety Policy
 - State-wide quarterly PHIG meeting to share our approach and success using funds
 - NYSACHO members meeting; on the Tioga Castings situation and enforcement plan
- Hosted a County-wide Employee Wellness Fair for all County Employees, completely planned by PH staff.
- Our Public Health Nurse is now a certified Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Instructor.

Challenges

- Communicable disease outbreaks continue to keep us on our toes. Early in 2024, a measles case in New York State led us to prepare if a case occurred locally. We did see a handful of Pertussis cases locally, and flu seems to be on the rise compared to other years. Additionally, avian bird flu-H5NI continues to challenge the public health field as we work to stay up to date on the spread and potential impact on our community and keep the public informed. It is vital to stay ahead of communicable disease outbreaks, but the work can be very time-consuming and requires staff to be pulled from their typical work duties.
- Early Intervention continues to struggle with the provider shortage, with children on waitlists and less providers to complete eligibility evaluations. Our Early Intervention Service Coordinators worked tirelessly to find providers and keep families engaged while waiting for services. Additionally, the EI-Hub roll out created an additional workload for all those involved in that program.
- Dental decay continues to be an increasing problem among those seen on the Dental Van. By the end of 2024 our dental team saw over 1,000 patients who had some form of dental decay (ranging from low to high-risk decay).
- Electronic forms and processes continue to be a challenge, although we have worked hard on some and have had great successes; there is much to convert for internal efficiency and providing better services/opportunities to the public.
- The Rabies Program was a focus of 2024. Internal investigations lacked complete information, they showed that medical providers occasionally needed education and outreach (which we did) to assure proper treatment was done. Worked tirelessly to improve processes, education and treatment.

2025 Goals

- Expand and retain current workforce through incentives, engagement satisfaction activities, and enhanced training opportunities.
- Implement a comprehensive three-year agency Strategic Plan that incorporates existing efforts and emphasizes Quality Improvement/Assurance.
- Implement new and/or improved programs/services identified in the community survey, including programming from grant awards (i.e. healthy homes, railroad safety and MRC).
- Focus on the clinic and discern how we may best meet the needs of the community utilizing the CLIA; and implement it accordingly.
- Complete the Community Health Needs Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan in collaboration with community partners, and public participation.