



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

# Public Health Planning Guide for Local Government

Guide to support the preparation and ongoing review of local  
public health plans

*Public Health Act 2016 (WA)*

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## **Disclaimer**

This document provides general guidance on public health planning aspects of the *Public Health Act 2016* (the PH Act) This guide is not a substitute for reading the PH Act and should not be regarded as legal advice.

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## **Acknowledgment of country and people**

The WA Department of Health acknowledges the Aboriginal people of the many traditional lands and language groups of Western Australia. It acknowledges the wisdom of Aboriginal Elders both past and present and pays respect to Aboriginal communities of today.

## **Contributions**

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*Working together to protect,  
preserve, promote, and  
improve good health and  
wellbeing of Western  
Australians.*

# Part 1. Introduction

Public health refers to the health and wellbeing of the public; it is much more than just the provision of health services and managing environmental health risks but encompasses all aspects of life that enable the community to thrive (Figure 1). By actively planning for the best public health outcomes of a community, local governments can support and drive the changes required.



Figure 1: Public health and wellbeing (Source: WA Department of Health)

The requirement to undertake public health planning elevates public health as an important function across government; it complements other areas government must already plan for, such as emergency management. It ensures that governments are regularly assessing the public health needs of the population and implementing strategies to address gaps and public health priorities. A key component of this is knowing the needs of the population being served, by looking at data and consulting with the community. Public health planning also drives the development or strengthening of partnerships across government, non-government organisations, and the community.

The Public Health Planning Guide for Local Government (the guide) has been developed to assist Western Australian local governments with public health planning, acknowledging that different local governments may adopt different approaches to developing their local public health plans. This guide should be read in conjunction with the [State Public Health Plan for Western Australia \(WA\) 2025-2030](#) (SPHP).

## 1.1 Background

Implementation of Stage 5A of the *Public Health Act 2016* (PH Act) commenced on 4 June 2024, formally enacting the requirement for the preparation of a:

1. SPHP prepared by the Chief Health Officer
2. local public health plan prepared by each local government.

The inaugural SPHP for WA was released in 2019. This version is currently under review, and an updated version will be published before 4 June 2025.

To ensure the best possible health, wellbeing, and quality of life for all Western Australians, now and into the future, the objectives of the updated SPHP are to:

- promote
- prevent
- protect
- enable public health.

Additionally, there are 2 overarching objectives that should be integrated across these objectives:

- Aboriginal health and wellbeing
- equity and inclusion.

Each objective is supported by several priorities. Whilst many of these were included in the previous version of the SPHP, managing the effects of climate change on people's health is a new addition to the updated version.

## 1.2 State government and public health

State government agencies are primarily responsible for the health and wellbeing of Western Australians. The WA Department of Health (the department) leads the coordination and delivery of public health and wellbeing policies, programs, and services in WA.

## 1.3 Local government and public health

Local governments have a unique opportunity to positively impact the health and wellbeing of their community members through the extensive range of services they provide and for which they are responsible.

## 1.4 Legislation

The legislated requirement for public health planning strengthens the need to better plan for public health and wellbeing by both local and state government.

Legislation aligns the public health objectives and policy priorities of local and state government whilst strengthening partnerships across government, non-government agencies and the community. Strong partnerships improve collaboration and innovation to support the biggest gains in public health and wellbeing.

The local public health plan must comply with the requirements of the PH Act and be consistent with the SPHP. However, no specific process or standard template applies, and local governments

should tailor their plans to the needs of their community. Activities that local governments currently undertake, as well as programs and policies already in place, may already be addressing or supporting the health and wellbeing of their community.

Table 1 outlines the key elements of a local public health plan as legislated in section 45 of the PH Act, and demonstrates how local government can meet legislative requirements when developing their local public health plan.

A local public health plan must	How can this be achieved?		
Identify public health needs – what are the specific needs of their community?	<p><b>Health profile:</b> An analysis of the health status and health determinants of the population</p>		
Examine health status and health determinants – what is the current state of health of their community and what are the key factors that influence it?			
Establish objectives and policy priorities (the key strategies) for: <table border="1" data-bbox="119 853 984 927"> <tr> <td data-bbox="119 853 568 927">1. Promotion, improvement, and protection of public health</td> <td data-bbox="574 853 984 927">2. Development and delivery of public health services</td> </tr> </table>	1. Promotion, improvement, and protection of public health	2. Development and delivery of public health services	<p><b>Strategic plan:</b> A plan outlining the objectives, policy priorities and actions that focus on achieving positive public health outcomes</p>
1. Promotion, improvement, and protection of public health	2. Development and delivery of public health services		
Identify how the objectives and policy priorities are proposed to be achieved			
Establish a framework for identifying and responding to public health risks			
Describe the formation of partnerships for undertaking public health initiatives, projects, and programs to achieve the objectives and policy priorities			
Ensure continuous review, replacement, and reporting of the plan	<p><b>Monitoring and evaluation framework:</b> A process for reviewing, replacement, and reporting on the local public health plan</p>		

**Table 1: Applying key legislative elements to a local public health plan (Source: Adapted from the PH Act WA 2016)**

Sections 45 to 47 of the PH Act provide the public health planning requirements for local governments. An extract has been provided at [Appendix A](#).

### 1.5 Format of local public health plans

All local governments are required to plan for the future of their district under s.5.56 (1) of the *Local Government Act 1995* (the LG Act). Local public health plans can be integrated into local governments’ strategic or corporate plans in accordance with section 45(3) of the PH Act.

Public health planning aligns with, and places a public health lens over, the integrated planning and reporting framework as an informing strategy. This allows a local government to set their priorities within their resourcing capability and deliver short, medium, and long-term community priorities and aspirations.





Many activities already carried out by local governments will have public health benefits, including activities that respond to climate change.

### 2.1.2 Establish governance arrangements

Governance may include:

- assigning responsibility to senior staff to influence the strategic and political landscape
- establishing a committee or working group to oversee the process
- establishing reporting mechanisms.

### 2.1.3 Collaborate with internal partners

Local public health planning should involve all divisions of local government such as corporate services, corporate communications, community development, infrastructure, sustainability, planning, operations, and regulatory divisions. All divisions of a local government play a role in delivering services or providing assets relating to public health.

### 2.1.4 Develop skills and workforce capacity

Local governments should focus on building the skills internally to develop and sustain a local public health plan. Local Health Service Providers (HSPs) can advise of any existing public health planning networks that connect local governments and enable sharing of ideas.

### 2.1.5 Develop and communicate the planning framework




Local public health planning requires the development of a planning framework that outlines the steps to develop key components of the plan and the appropriate timeframes.

## 2.2 Develop a health status profile

A local government health status profile documents everything that is known about the health status and health determinants of a local community, and the local public health risks. The health status profile may include a comparison of the local data with state and national averages.

Having access to meaningful data to describe the current health status of the community will ensure that health priorities and objectives are based on the best available evidence.

A health status profile:

 <p>Describes the current state of health of local people</p>	 <p>Identifies any major health risk factors and causes of ill health</p>	 <p>Identifies priority health areas for action</p>
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A local government health status profile can be obtained through your local HSP. There are further resources available to assist local government to refine their local health status profile. Contact details for HSPs, links and additional suggested resources can be found on the [Public Health Planning](#) website.

## **2.3 Review existing and establish objectives and priorities**

A local government should establish public health objectives based on the current public health risks identified for the community and in line with the SPHP. Policy priorities should be determined for each of the objectives and should outline how the objectives will be achieved.

### **2.3.1 Review the State Public Health Plan**

Local government should review the objectives and policy priorities of the SPHP and consider how they apply to the local community.

### **2.3.2 Review existing local plans and policies (desktop review)**

One of the most important steps of the planning process is to review strategies that are already in place to address public health needs and issues.

### **2.3.3 Develop objectives and priorities**

The SPHP identifies the objectives and priorities for the whole state and provides a framework for local government to consider and adapt as necessary. Local public health plans should reflect the local context and priorities identified by their community. It is not expected that all priorities identified in the SPHP will be relevant for every local public health plan.

When deciding on which priorities are applicable to a local government area, it is important to consider the information collected in the health status profile and health determinants of the local district, as well as through community consultation.

Given the specific requirement in the PH Act for local public health plans to be consistent with the SPHP, it is recommended that local governments demonstrate how the SPHP objectives and priorities were considered in the formulation of their plans.

## **2.5 Engage with stakeholders and the community**

Local government should keep their community engaged and informed, providing opportunities for stakeholders and community members to participate in the public health planning process. Consultation on proposed priorities is critical to understand community needs. Local governments may already have established processes to engage with their community.

With online engagement being popular, consideration should be given to ensuring those who have limited computer literacy or access to the internet, are able to participate in the process. Examples of engagement can include focus groups, stakeholder workshops, surveys, and consultation on the draft plan.

## **2.6 Identify risks**

Local government will need to assess and prioritise public health risks in their local community.

Information that could be gathered through engagement with stakeholders and community members includes:

- views regarding public health risks and their relative priority
- ideas for addressing risks.

It is important to consult with different population groups within a community to ensure that all voices are heard and represented.

## **2.7 Establish partnerships**

Establishing partnerships with a range of agencies will support and guide the implementation of locally based objectives and policy priorities. It may help to identify resources, grants, and other available funding. The local HSP is a key partner and may be able to offer the following support:

- raising awareness of the public health planning process
- assisting in identifying public health elements of existing activities and initiatives
- providing health and wellbeing data for health status reports
- assisting with data interpretation
- identifying key public health partners
- networking with other local governments
- supporting local government executive endorsement.

## **2.8 Develop an action plan**

Consider actions that need to be implemented to achieve the identified objectives and priorities. Actions should be specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic, and should describe in detail how the priorities will be achieved. Each action should be allocated to an individual or team and have specific timeframes for completion.

Key considerations include:

- who are the responsible officers carrying out these actions?
- when will the actions be undertaken and for how long?
- how will progress of actions be measured and monitored?
- what resources are needed to carry out these actions?
- what communication needs to occur and to whom?

Actions should address the overarching objectives of Aboriginal health and wellbeing, and equity and inclusion, in line with the SPHP.

Actions should also be monitored and evaluated over time and adjusted or terminated as necessary.

## **2.9 Write the plan**

The format of the local public health plan must be relevant for the local government, specific to their community, and consistent with the SPHP. Local governments already have processes to incorporate community engagement in the development of new policies and plans, which can be followed to ensure that stakeholders and community members can provide feedback during the drafting of the local public health plan.

## **2.10 Publish the plan**

A local government must publish its first local public health plan no later than 4 June 2026.

Where required, the final draft of the local public health plan should be endorsed by council and any other internal committees prior to publishing and implementing the plan.

## **2.11 Evaluate, review and report**

A person should be nominated to be responsible for evaluating, reviewing, and reporting on the local public health plan.

### **2.11.1 Reviewing plans**

A local government must review its local public health plan each year and may amend or replace it at any time. Conducting an annual review ensures that actions identified in the plan are being implemented satisfactorily, and that the priorities and activities are appropriately aligned over the life of the plan.

The PH Act does not prescribe how an annual review might be conducted. The review is an opportunity to:

- check implementation is on track
- check results to date are as expected
- report on and celebrate achievements
- inform other related plans and policies
- strengthen networks and partnerships
- reduce or conclude activities that might no longer be necessary
- commence new activities in response to newly identified needs
- decide what needs to be done differently
- reconsider strategic directions and priorities
- influence resource allocation
- commence the next period of activity.

Where a local government prepares a local public health plan that is integrated with other strategic plans, they need to be aware of the differing review and replacement timeframes required by the LG Act and the PH Act.

A summary of the suggested stages of an annual review can be found at [Appendix B](#). Where changes are made to the plan through these reviews, these should be communicated to stakeholders and community members.

### **2.11.2 Evaluating local public health plans**

The SPHP includes information on how the department monitors and evaluates the local public health plan to determine whether the intended objectives and priorities are achieved.

The department uses a combination of surveys, reports, key performance indicators, and dashboards to monitor progress and measure impact of programs across time.

Local governments may choose to follow a similar process reflective of their own priorities and actions/programs within their plan. Local governments may utilise their existing framework or

develop new processes to monitor and evaluate the programs and policies related to their local public health plans to determine if the objectives are met.

Impact of outcomes may be contingent on the targets a local government sets as part of their local public health plan. Local governments with greater capacity or resourcing may choose more ambitious targets for improvements than others with less capacity to do so.

### **2.11.3 Existing local public health plans**

Local governments may already have a current local public health plan in place. These plans will still be relevant, however local governments must ensure existing plans are consistent with the new SPHP and comply with the requirements of the PH Act by 4 June 2026. If the plan is over 5 years, it must be replaced.

### **2.11.4 Replacing local public health plans**

Unless it is replaced sooner, a local public health plan must be replaced at the end of the period of 5 years after it was prepared. The process of replacing a local public health plan may include a combination of activities described in the broader planning process or the annual review.

### **2.11.5 Reporting**

In accordance with section 22 of the PH Act, local governments are required to report to the Chief Health Officer on the performance of functions under the PH Act. As part of this reporting process, the Chief Health Officer may require local governments to report on whether they have produced their public health plan. No additional details are required.

## **Part 3. Resources**

The [Public Health Planning](#) website provides links to key resources to assist local governments in developing their local public health plans. As additional resources are developed, including those that focus on Aboriginal health and wellbeing, and managing the effects of climate change, they will be added to the website.

## Part 4. Appendices

### Appendix A – PH Act 2016 – Extract sections 45 – 47

#### **Public Health Act 2016 - Extract**

##### *Section 45 – Local Public Health Plans*

- (1) A local government must prepare a public health plan (a local public health plan) that applies to its local government district.
- (2) A local public health plan must be consistent with the State public health plan.
- (3) A local public health plan may be prepared in conjunction with a plan for the future of the local government district prepared under the Local Government Act 1995 section 5.56.
- (4) A local public health plan must —
  - (a) identify the public health needs of the local government district; and
  - (b) include an examination of data relating to health status and health determinants in the local government district; and
  - (c) establish objectives and policy priorities for —
    - (i) the promotion, improvement and protection of public health in the local government district; and
    - (ii) the development and delivery of public health services in the local government district; and
  - (d) identify how, based on available evidence, the objectives and policy priorities referred to in paragraph (c) are proposed to be achieved; and
  - (e) describe how the local government proposes to work with the Chief Health Officer and other bodies undertaking public health initiatives, projects and programmes to achieve the objectives and policy priorities referred to in paragraph (c); and
  - (f) include a strategic framework for the identification, evaluation and management of public health risks in the local government district and any other matters relating to public health risks in the local government district —
    - (i) that the local government considers appropriate to include in the plan; or
    - (ii) that are required to be included in the plan by the Chief Health Officer or the regulations; and
  - (g) include a report, in accordance with the regulations, on the performance by the local government of its functions under this Act.

- (5) A local government must review its local public health plan each year and may amend or replace it at any time.
- (6) Unless it is sooner replaced, a local public health plan must be replaced at the end of the period of 5 years after it was prepared.
- (7) A local government must prepare its first local public health plan not later than 2 years after this section comes into operation.

*Section 46. Publication of current local public health plans*

- (1) A local government must make its current local public health plan publicly available without charge.
- (2) A local government may comply with subsection (1) in any way the local government considers appropriate, including (without limitation) by making the current local public health plan available on a website maintained by or on behalf of the local government.

*Section 47. Provision of local public health plans to Chief Health Officer*

- (1) The Chief Health Officer may, by notice in writing, direct a local government to provide the Chief Health Officer with all or any of the following —
  - (a) a copy of the local government’s current local public health plan;
  - (b) a copy of any amendments to the local government’s current local public health plan.
- (2) A notice under subsection (1) may —

- (a) direct a local government to supply a copy of a particular local public health plan or particular amendments to a plan; or
- (b) direct a local government to supply, on an ongoing basis, a copy of all local public health plans or amendments to plans prepared after a specific date; or
- (c) do both of those things.

- (3) A direction under subsection (1) to a local government must specify a time frame for compliance with the direction, and the local government must comply with the direction within that time frame.
- (4) The Chief Health Officer may at any time, by notice in writing, amend or revoke a direction given under subsection (1).



## Appendix B – Stages of an annual review

Stages	Action	Information requirements and considerations
<b>1. Plan for an annual review</b>	Identify timing and information requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and gather the information you will need for stages 2,3, and 4 of conducting the annual review.</li> <li>When is your target deadline for the annual review?</li> <li>Are there budget timeframes that this review might influence?</li> </ul>
	Identify stakeholders and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify who needs to be involved in the review process.</li> </ul>
	Create an annual review schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule when you will collect and analyse the information.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Check implementation is on track</b>	Check the progress of health actions and partner projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the actions being implemented within the published timeframes?</li> </ul>
	Identify what might need to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What amendments may be needed to the plan?</li> <li>Do timeframes need to be modified?</li> <li>Does the project need to be reassigned to someone else?</li> <li>Do the actions need to be amended to reflect changes in funding, services, policies etc?</li> </ul>
<b>3. Check the context has not changed</b>	Evaluate progress and outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the expected progress or outcomes of actions outlined in the plan.</li> </ul>
	Review any change in health status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider if the public health needs, health status or health detriments of the local government district have changed?</li> </ul>
	Identify emerging health risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check whether any national or state and local health priorities have changed.</li> </ul>
	Identify relevant funding opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any new, relevant funding opportunities that can help you to achieve your priorities?</li> </ul>
	Identify system or personnel changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will changes impact performance and function?</li> </ul>
	Identify budget changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have there been budgetary changes that may impact programs?</li> </ul>
<b>4. Recommendations and amendments</b>	Propose changes to the next phase of the Local PH Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review process may identify priorities and actions that may need to be amended, updated, or even removed from the plan if the actions are no longer considered achievable (e.g. no available funding to complete the next stages) or appropriate.</li> <li>All amendments must be published.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from Public Health Planning for Local Government – March 2018 edition (WA Department of Health)



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