



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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**Susan R. Cooper, Commissioner**

The Department of Health works to promote, protect and improve the health and well-being of Tennesseans. Keeping people healthy by preventing problems that contribute to disease and injury is the overall emphasis of the department. Responsibilities include immunizing children against diseases, recruiting doctors to practice in rural medically underserved areas of Tennessee, offering early prenatal care and proper nutrition to pregnant women, assuring that restaurants meet standards of cleanliness, and performing laboratory tests ensuring safe drinking water.

The greatest causes of premature death and preventable illness are closely related to the way we live—what we eat, whether we use tobacco, how much we exercise, and what we do to protect our own safety. The department promotes healthy lifestyles by educating Tennesseans about these risks and making them more aware of the importance of individuals taking responsibility for their health and their family's health.

The Department of Health works to ensure the quality of health care through the licensure and regulation of health professionals and health care facilities. The department also plays a critical role to ensure personal health care services are available when and where people need them and are accessible despite economic and geographic barriers. The department provides a variety of services for all age groups through local health departments across the state, ranging from well-child visits and immunizations to school health services, to family planning and prenatal care, to wellness programs, and education.

### History

Recurring epidemics of cholera, yellow fever and other frightening diseases were a powerful force in the development of what we know today as public health. Through the mid-1800s, Nashville, Knoxville, Memphis and many smaller cities and towns experienced epidemics that threatened life and economic well-being as well.

As a result, efforts began to establish a State Board of Health, and a bill was signed into law in 1877 to create such a board. For many years, the main activities of the board were combating epidemics, forming county boards of health, working on school sanitation, and maintaining vital records of births and deaths in the state.

In 1923, legislation created the Department of Public Health. Activities and responsibilities have changed and grown through the years as health needs and medical care have evolved in the state. In 1983, the department's name was changed from the Department of Public Health to the Department of Health and Environment to more clearly reflect its broad functions. As part of the state's increased focus on environmental protection and conservation, the environmental programs were transferred in 1991 to the new Department of Environment and Conservation. The department's name was then changed to the Department of Health.

## Services

***Communicable and Environmental Disease Services.*** Tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS continue to pose significant health threats in Tennessee. Local health departments provide testing, counseling, treatment and contact tracing to control the spread of these diseases. The department has placed emphasis on care coordination for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. In its effort to promote childhood immunizations, the department provides immunizations, tracks immunization rates through the Tennessee Immunization Registry, provides outreach to encourage parents to immunize their children and is involved in coordinating the distribution of vaccines to private providers through the federal Vaccines for Children program. Flu and pneumonia immunizations, tetanus-diphtheria boosters and hepatitis B vaccines are also available to adults at local health departments. The department is involved in the investigation of disease outbreaks, contact tracing to control the spread of communicable diseases, and activities to assess the risk of exposure to occupational and environmental hazards. Information obtained through these efforts and surveillance activities guide the development of policies and procedures to protect the public from health threats.

***Dental Services.*** Oral disease prevention services in schools throughout the state include oral health education, the application of dental sealants, dental screening and referral, school-based fluoride programs, and daily tooth brushing programs. Fluoridation of public water supplies is another key component of the preventive dental program. Clinical dental services are provided in selected local health departments and in community initiative sites to complement needs of specific geographic areas. Mobile dental clinics provide dental services at school sites to high-risk children in select regions of the state. Oral Health Services partners with public health nurses to implement an early childhood caries intervention program involving fluoride varnish application, dental screening and education for children and parents.

***General Environmental Health.*** This area's activities include inspection of food service establishments, camps, hotels and motels, bed and breakfast establishments, tattoo parlors and public swimming pools. It also conducts environmental surveys in schools and child care facilities and monitors rabies control.

***Laboratory Services.*** The State Public Health Laboratory and its two regional laboratories across the state provide valuable support of public health issues such as newborn testing, disease prevention and a clean environment. The laboratories provide services to program areas within the department, local health departments, hospitals, independent laboratories, other state departments, physicians, dentists and clinics. In addition, they provide public health services that are not available from other sources, such as rabies testing. The public health labs are a part of the National Laboratory Response Network that is the laboratory component of homeland security for analyzing specimens related to terrorism.

***Licensure and Regulation of Health Care Professionals and Facilities.*** The department is responsible for ensuring quality in health manpower and health care facilities. The department helps administer state laws that require health care professionals to meet certain standards. Doctors, nurses, dentists and other types of health care professionals are licensed by regulatory boards. Disciplinary action is taken if state standards are violated.

Hospitals, nursing homes, ambulatory surgical treatment centers and other kinds of health care facilities are also licensed by the department. In addition, facilities are assessed and certified for participation in the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Ambulance services and emergency medical personnel across the state are checked to ensure that quality standards are met when emergency medical services are needed, and medical laboratories and personnel are tested and licensed.

**Maternal and Child Health.** The maternal and child population has long been a focal point of public health programs. Local health departments provide a wide variety of services aimed at reducing the infant mortality rate, lowering the adolescent pregnancy rate, encouraging early entry into prenatal care, and reducing childhood morbidity. Services include screening and follow-up for children with potential lead poisoning, outreach, intensive case management, family planning, prenatal care, mammography screening and the development of comprehensive school health programs. Routine screening of all newborns for hearing problems, certain metabolic and inherited disorders and a regional genetic program are other important maternal and child health services. The department has placed particular emphasis on care coordination for children with severe or chronic medical needs. Services include payment for certain medical or health-related services, home visitation, interaction with schools, coordination among multiple medical providers, assistance in accessing needed social and medical services, and education and support.

**Nutrition and Wellness Services.** The goals of this section are to eliminate health disparities and increase years and quality of life for all Tennesseans. These goals are accomplished by emphasizing the importance of healthy choices; by promoting healthy behaviors through wellness, lifestyle, tobacco prevention and cessation initiatives; and through disease prevention and management efforts that target specific disease prevention strategies, coupled with disease management initiatives. The healthy and safe communities component promotes comprehensive health education, injury prevention and control programs, rape and sexual assault prevention programs, and poison control programs. Local health departments administer programs that provide supplemental foods to low-income, pregnant, breast-feeding and postpartum women, as well as infants and children. In some counties, supplemental foods are also provided to the elderly. Nutrition education on how to use these foods as part of a good daily diet is also provided. A variety of preventive and therapeutic community nutrition services are provided to Tennessee citizens.

**Rural and Local Health Services.** Improvement of community health systems is a major focus area. Local health councils and the community diagnosis process regularly assess the priority health issues in Tennessee communities and seek to build initiatives that address these issues. The Rural Health and Health Access offices seek to augment underserved communities by recruiting providers for communities and by ensuring adequate systems of care.

**Division of Minority Health and Disparity Elimination.** This division advocates for the development of culturally competent policies, programs, and services to respond to the health needs of minority Tennesseans and address health disparities due to race, ethnicity, age, gender, geography, poverty or culture. Technical assistance and consultation are provided to state agencies, community and faith-based organizations and health professionals to address related concerns that impact the health of constituent populations. The division funds, on a limited basis, community programs that target at-risk youth through academic, skill-building and recreational activities, and collaborates with public and private sector entities to build working coalitions and networks for improved health care access, quality and information dissemination to minority communities across the state.

**Office of Information Technology.** The OIT provides and maintains information resources which enable policy makers, administrators and managers to make critical decisions concerning the use of resources that will affect the Department of Health and to record, process and analyze information. This support includes systems applications and operations activities for mainframe, mini-frame and personal computers as well as data and text management plus maintenance of the Department's Local Area Network. OIT provides direction, planning, infrastructure and coordination in managing the information technology needs of the Department of Health through four health enterprise

service areas: Technical Services, Application Services, Security Services and Project Management Services.

**Policy, Planning and Assessment.** The department collects and analyzes information for the entire Tennessee population relative to such health status indicators as infant mortality, low birth weight, adequacy of prenatal care services, morbidity and mortality from disease and injury, immunization status of children, adolescent pregnancy rates, and lead toxicity in children. Statewide registries for cancer incidence, birth defects, and traumatic brain injuries, and several large data collection systems are the mechanisms used to obtain this information. The resulting data is analyzed for the purpose of informing policy and shaping the health care delivery system in the state in order to respond to identified needs and to promote and protect the health of the citizens.

**Primary Care.** Local health departments in all 95 counties offer a variety of preventive services. Comprehensive primary care services are provided in selected health departments based on the needs of the community. Clinics are staffed with physicians or mid-level practitioners working under supervision and protocol. Local health departments participate in TennCare and other insurance programs.

**TennCare.** In addition to supporting the TennCare program by participating as service providers in the managed care organizations' provider networks, local health departments provide other services related to TennCare. These services include outreach activities to identify and assist with presumptive enrollment of pregnant women and presumptive enrollment of women who test positive for breast or cervical cancer who need and qualify for TennCare but are not yet enrolled. Local health departments also provide advocacy activities to educate enrollees concerning covered benefits and the managed care system and assistance in accessing medically necessary services. Care coordination and home visitation services are available for high-risk TennCare families with special health care needs. The health departments provide dental screening services to school children and early and periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment to children under age 21 pursuant to an arrangement with TennCare. The department also provides outreach to TennCare children through a centralized call center and community outreach program.

**Vital Records.** The Department maintains a central registry of births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions and legitimations in the state. Certified copies of these records are available at the Vital Records Office in Nashville, at selected county sites, and on the Vital Records Web site.

## Related Advisory Boards, Committees and Councils

The following committees may be contacted through the Commissioner's Office, Third Floor, Cordell Hull Building, 425 Fifth Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37243.

- Advisory Committee for Children's Special Services
- Advisory Panel for Nursing Home Quality Care Incentive Plan
- Child Nutrition and Wellness Advisory Committee
- Controlled Substance Database Program Advisory Committee
- Epilepsy Advisory Committee
- Genetics Advisory Committee
- Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Health
- Health Care Acquired Infections Committee
- Hemophilia Advisory Committee
- Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
- Minority Health Advisory Council
- Perinatal Advisory Committee
- Polysomnography Professional Standards Committee
- Preventive Health Block Grant Advisory Committee
- Public Health Council
- Public Health Emergency Advisory Committee
- Renal Disease Advisory Committee
- Tennessee Center of Diabetes Prevention and Health Improvement Board
- Tennessee Child Fatality Prevention Team
- Tennessee Medical Examiners Advisory Council
- Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council
- Tuberculosis Advisory Committee
- Women's Health Advisory Committee

## Regulatory Boards

The following boards set qualifications for professionals who provide health care in Tennessee, license or certify qualified applicants, and take disciplinary action when standards are violated. These boards may be contacted at: Health Related Boards, 227 French Landing, Suite 300 Heritage Place Metro Center, Nashville, TN 37243.

- Advisory Committee for Acupuncture
- Board for Licensing Health Care Facilities
- Board of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors
- Board of Athletic Trainers
- Board of Chiropractic Examiners
- Board of Communication Disorders and Sciences
- Board of Dentistry
- Board of Dietitian and Nutritionist Examiners
- Board of Dispensing Opticians
- Board of Electrolysis Examiners
- Board of Examiners for Nursing Home Administrators
- Board of Examiners in Psychology
- Board of Medical Examiners
- Board of Massage Licensure
- Board of Nursing
- Board of Occupational Therapy
- Board of Optometry
- Board of Osteopathic Examiners
- Board of Pharmacy
- Board of Physical Therapy
- Board of Podiatric Medical Examiners
- Board of Professional Counselors, Marital and Family Therapists, and Clinical Pastoral Therapists
- Board of Respiratory Care
- Board of Social Workers
- Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners
- Committee for Clinical Perfusionists
- Committee on Physician Assistants
- Council for Licensing Hearing Instrument Specialists
- Council of Certified Professional Midwifery
- Emergency Medical Services Board
- Health Care Facilities Civil Penalties Panel
- Medical Laboratory Board
- Medical X-Ray Operators Certification
- Nursing Assistants/Aides

### Commissioner Susan R. Cooper, MSN, RN

*Tennessee Department of Health*

When sworn into office **Susan R. Cooper** made history as the first nurse to ever serve as Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Health. At the request of Governor Phil Bredesen, Cooper came to state government in September 2005 on loan from Vanderbilt University's School of Nursing, where she served as a faculty member and assistant dean. As special policy and health advisor to the Governor, Cooper was instrumental in developing Tennessee's Health Care Safety Net, a network of public and private health care providers and programs serving the State's uninsured population. She later assumed leadership of Project Diabetes, a program Governor Bredesen created to curb the type 2 diabetes threat facing young Tennesseans. Cooper also helped facilitate GetFitTN, the public awareness portion of Governor Bredesen's campaign to promote healthier lifestyles and habits among Tennesseans. Cooper received both her Bachelor and Master of Nursing degrees from Vanderbilt University. Currently pursuing a Doctor of Nursing Practice from the University of Kentucky, Cooper has an extensive background in vulnerable populations, program planning and evaluation, health policy, health care regulation and evidence-based practice. In addition to serving as a public health nurse, Cooper's career experience also includes work as a nurse specializing in emergency and intensive care.

