

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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Although the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene was created in 1969, its historical development began in the nineteenth century. The Department of Health originally was established in 1874 (Chapter 200, Acts of 1874). The separate development of the Department of Mental Hygiene, however, dates from 1886, when the State Lunacy Commission was formed (Chapter 487, Acts of 1886). In 1922, the Commission was replaced by the Board of Mental Hygiene (Chapter 29, Acts of 1922). The Board, in turn, was succeeded by the Department of Mental Hygiene in 1949 (Chapter 685, Acts of 1949). By 1961, the State Board of Health and Mental Hygiene was created to maintain authority over the Department of Health and the Department of Mental Hygiene (Chapter 841, Acts of 1961). The present Department of Health and Mental Hygiene replaced the State Board in 1969 (Chapter 77, Acts of 1969).

The mission of the Department is to assure the people of Maryland their inherent right to a healthful environment and a high level of physical, mental, and social health. Through the development of a comprehensive, continuous and accessible system of health services for the State, the Department emphasizes the promotion of health and the prevention of disease and disability.

Many programs are by their nature public functions and cannot be performed effectively by the private sector. Prime among these is the responsibility for dealing with the epidemiological dimensions of hazards to health affecting the community, such as communicable diseases, and the organization of community efforts to prevent or control their impact.

Twenty-four local health departments report to the Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services and have access to all Departmental officials as well. Local health departments are the focal point in the delivery of services.

The Department provides or purchases direct care services primarily through residential and outpatient care for the mentally ill, the mentally retarded, the chronically ill, including those with tuberculosis, the impaired elderly, and persons with addictive conditions. It directly provides several community health services and also provides comprehensive health care services for the indigent and medically indigent.

In 1987, the Department was reorganized under three deputy secretaries who are responsible for distinct programmatic areas: Operations; Public Health Services; and Policy, Financing, and Regulation. The Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene also directs and coordinates numerous boards, commissions, and various citizen advisory groups.

Informational brochures and other publications useful to the public are available from the various subdivisions within the Department. These may be obtained either at no cost or for a small fee by contacting the appropriate agency.