



"Protecting the health of all Californians"

# COMMUNICATE. PUBLIC. HEALTH.

JANUARY 17, 2017

## California's Public Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith

Karen L. Smith, MD, MPH, Director and State Public Health Officer of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) was appointed by Governor Brown on March 23, 2015, and was confirmed by the California State Senate on March 3, 2016.

Smith believes that the ultimate goal of the public health system is achieving optimal health and wellbeing for everyone. Public Health protects individuals from infectious disease threats, foodborne illnesses and toxins in their environment. To achieve this lofty goal, CDPH must create what the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation calls "a culture of health" in every community across California. A culture of health is one where being healthy and staying healthy is an esteemed social value; where individuals, businesses, government, and organizations foster healthy communities and lifestyles; and where the health of the population guides public and private decision making.

While the mission of public health has not changed, Dr. Smith is making great strides towards transforming CDPH into an agile and nimble organization that is able to adapt to the changing public health environment and evolve over time into the ideal public health department. Smith is shifting the focus to not just on where we are but on where we are going.



She is committed to improving business processes throughout CDPH.

Smith acknowledges there is a lot of work to do and believes that strengthening the foundational public health services (communicable disease control; chronic disease and injury prevention; environmental public health; maternal, child, family health; and vital records) is the first step.

Dr. Smith is dedicated to advancing CDPH's work with the people and organizations of California to make our state the healthiest in the nation in 10 years. To do this, CDPH is

aligning all of the department's efforts to one or more of the six goal areas adopted by the Governor's Let's Get Healthy California Task Force through interdisciplinary goal teams, one for each of the six goal areas in Let's Get Healthy California. The six goal areas are healthy beginnings, living well, end of life, redesigning the health system, creating healthy communities, and lowering the cost of care.

Prior to her appointment, Dr. Smith served as public health officer and deputy director at the Napa County Health and Human Services Agency since 2004. She was medical staff for infectious disease at Queen of the Valley Medical Center in Napa since 2012 and was a faculty consultant for the Francis J. Curry International Tuberculosis Center at the University of California, San Francisco since 1997. Smith is a physician specializing in infectious disease and public health.

Dr. Smith looks forward to working with you and your communities to improve the health of everyone who calls California home, and the millions who visit each year. Together, we can make California the healthiest state in the nation as we tackle the public health challenges of the 21st Century and beyond.

## Public Health in California, a History.

California was settled, in part, during the Gold Rush of 1849. The state grew rapidly as word spread around the world that this was a golden land. In many ways, the Gold Rush also led to the creation of the state's public health system as we now know it. Cholera, smallpox, measles, mumps and other communicable diseases quickly spread through pioneer settlements and mining camps, causing nine of every 10 deaths to those who came to California seeking a better way of life.

In 1870, Dr. Thomas Logan became the first "state health officer" of the California Board of Health, becoming the second oldest health department in the nation. Their first public health challenge: fight cholera.

Today, with more than 38 million residents, California is the largest state to have its public health department nationally accredited. Working with local health departments, state,

federal and private partners, the work performed by CDPH touches our lives every day in every community in every corner of California.

That work happens around the clock and throughout the year. From protecting newborns through genetic screening to ensuring senior citizens' golden years are safe by licensing care facilities.

Public health accomplishes its mandates through the use of surveillance and epidemiology, emergency preparedness and response, communications, policy development and support, community partnerships, and business competencies. Smith is dedicated to collaborating with partners in government and other stakeholders to protect the health and well-being of all Californians to the best of our ability.

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