



PROGRAM EVALUATION DIVISION

NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

January 2013

Report No. 2013-01

The Division of Public Health Should Remain in the Department of Health and Human Services

Summary

The General Assembly directed the Program Evaluation Division to study the feasibility of the transfer of all functions, powers, duties, and obligations vested in the Division of Public Health in the Department of Health and Human Services to the University of North Carolina Health Care System and/or the University of North Carolina School of Public Health.

North Carolina's public health system is an intricate network of partnerships between the Division of Public Health and local health departments, state agencies and universities, and other entities. The Division of Public Health is one part of the State's public health system, working with both internal and external partners to improve and protect the health of North Carolinians.

The Division of Public Health should remain in the Department of Health and Human Services and should not be transferred to the University of North Carolina Health Care System or School of Public Health. Public health authorities have powers that are reserved for states. These authorities perform other activities that are more appropriate for a state agency to perform than another entity. Further, the missions of the University of North Carolina Health Care System and School of Public Health do not match the work of the Division of Public Health.

North Carolina's public health system is seen as a model, but the State ranks in the bottom half of states for health outcomes because of high risk factors. North Carolina is ranked 32nd in the country for overall health due to risk factors that affect the State's health outcomes. Many of these risk factors are beyond the control of the Division of Public Health and require a comprehensive government-wide approach to address them.

There are organizational models that could improve public health delivery in North Carolina. The Program Evaluation Division identified additional strategies that could put North Carolina in the forefront of public health including strengthening regional activities, using data to focus efforts, and continuing quality improvement efforts.

The Division of Public Health should remain in the Department of Health and Human Services. However, creating a government-wide approach and exploring new strategies could strengthen the public health system. The General Assembly should

- establish the North Carolina Public Health Council to develop a government-wide action plan for improving health outcomes; and
- direct the Division of Public Health to strengthen the public health system by exploring ways to increase regionalization, improve the use the data, and strengthen quality improvement activities.