
FOREWORD

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Public health legal preparedness is a core foundation of our ability to ensure the nation is prepared to prevent, respond to, and reduce the adverse health effects of public health emergencies and disasters. Without clear legal authorities, our preparedness and response enterprise suffers from unnecessary commotion at the very times we most need clarity.

Over the past six years, our nation has witnessed unprecedented efforts to build preparedness and response capabilities at the same time when we had been called on to collectively respond to unprecedented incidents. Public health legal preparedness has been a key element in those efforts. We continue to learn and apply lessons from real-world events with the objective of strengthening our ability to heed the call to respond when needed.

In June 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and partners convened the first National Summit on Public Health Legal Preparedness, a milestone event in national public health preparedness. The 242 invited participants represented an exceptional group of thought leaders from every level of government, and from a broad range of sectors, including professional organizations, non-profits, and academe. The collective real-life experience, diverse backgrounds and broad spectrum of expertise that Summit participants brought to the table are a testament to the nature of our enterprise – we all must play a role in our preparedness and response efforts. Those we serve – our entire nation – will look to us for leadership and measure our success by our ability to pre-

vent or reduce the adverse health effects of all-hazards disasters, whether naturally occurring or man-made.

This multidisciplinary approach is paramount to addressing public health issues in general, but even more in the area of public health preparedness and times of crisis, when only highly coordinated efforts can assure timely implementation of life-saving solutions. Without this multidisciplinary approach, and especially without the interconnectedness of public health and law, today's generations would not be the beneficiaries of the many major public health accomplishments of the 20th century (immunization, motor vehicle safety, etc.). The Summit presented an invaluable, first of its kind opportunity to learn from each other and build trust; the more we understand and appreciate our respective roles, responsibilities and authorities, the better prepared we will be for the challenges ahead of us so that we, as a society, continue to claim public health victories. To that end, as we strive to develop new and strengthen existing collaborations, partnerships and public health legal tools, we must, at the same time, be considerate of the possibly fragile balance of the protection of the community and the common good and the protection of individual liberties.

Our interdependence requires us to focus on maximizing opportunities for partnership and collaboration. The Summit's proceedings, contained herein in an action agenda format, provide just such opportunities. The status papers and companion action agendas focus on the core elements of public health legal preparedness: 1) legal authorities; 2) competencies; 3) coordination; and 4) information and best practices. We encourage you to read these papers closely, and to continue the dialogue about these topics among your colleagues and those you serve.

We look forward to continuing our partnership and collaboration with you to ensure a nation prepared.

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