



Public Health
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Geauga Public Health

GEAUGA PUBLIC HEALTH

Promoting and Protecting Community Health

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Agreement with Lake County General Health District: FAQ

1. What's happening with Geauga Public Health?

The Geauga Board of Health voted unanimously to enter into a cross-jurisdictional agreement with the Lake County General Health District to serve as a staffing agency for Geauga Public Health. The agreement becomes effective on April 3 and runs for five years.

2. Why is Lake County General Health District taking over Geauga Health?

This is not a takeover and it's not a merger. Lake County General Health District will serve as a staffing agency for Geauga Public Health. Our agreement with Lake is the best way for Geauga to maintain control of the health services we provide our residents while saving those residents significant money every year.

3. Why is this happening?

We needed to start realizing cost savings as soon as possible to deal with our projected budget deficits. This agreement will help us do that while also increasing our operating efficiency.

The agreement will save Geauga County residents as much as \$600,000 annually in health services costs, while maintaining all the vital services they currently receive from us.

4. What does this mean for Geauga County residents who need Geauga Health's services? Will we have to go to Lake County now?

This agreement is a critical step that's going to help us improve and streamline the services we provide. Geauga county residents will continue to go to the same places to receive the same services. None of that will change.

5. What are the advantages of an agreement between Geauga Public Health and Lake County General Health District?

We can be stronger together and more fiscally responsible to Geauga County residents. The efficiencies we'll realize mean benefits to the two health departments and residents of both counties.

For example, combining our organizations and county populations opens increased access to grant funding for additional beneficial programs, such as lower-cost public health services for residents. The agreement will result in operational efficiencies such as sharing specialty staff in the areas of data analysis, accreditation, community needs assessment, emergency preparedness, finance, and

grant writing. And it will also result in increased coordination for emergency response and public health emergencies.

6. Which organization initiated this arrangement?

Geauga did – after doing homework over a number of months, including a deep dive into our current organizational structure, the services we provide, the cost of those services and the feasible options that are available immediately to tackle our projected budget deficit while still providing superior – and even improved – services to our residents.

We reached out to a number of organizations, including the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and multiple county health districts. We concluded that the obvious partner for us is the Lake County General Health District. Lake is ready, willing and fully capable of serving as our staffing agency.

We have a track record of success working with Lake. For example, our health administrator Adam Litke is a contract employee from Lake. And our environmental health director Dan Lark has been a contract employee from Lake for over a year as well.

7. How will this impact Geauga Health employees?

Because Lake County General Health District will be providing us with staffing going forward, 17 Geauga Public Health employees will be laid off as of March 31. They can apply with Lake County General Health District to fill those staffing services, but no one is guaranteed a position. We will provide severance to impacted employees.

We know this is painful for many of our Geauga Public Health employees, and we're truly sorry for that, but the Board felt it had to make this change to guarantee we can continue providing the people we serve in Geauga County the services that they need and deserve.

8. Will Geauga Public Health help these employees find new work?

We met with impacted employees to discuss severance, and Ron Graham, the Lake County Health Commissioner, talked with impacted employees about job opportunities.

9. Are all the jobs held by Geauga Public Health employees being contracted out?

No. Vital Statistics will continue to be staffed by Geauga Public Health employees. Geauga Public Health employees will continue to oversee Vital Statistics because they have deep institutional knowledge and are best equipped to handle the tight controls the state places on these confidential records. Moreover, contracting this department to Lake would result in no cost savings.

10. What happens to the Geauga Board of Health?

The Geauga Board of Health, appointed by elected Geauga officials, will continue to control our policies, programs and services. All Geauga Public Health representatives, whether GPH employees or contracted Lake employees, will continue working on behalf of and at the direction of the Geauga Board of Health. We will continue to issue our own permits, maintain our vehicles, office, website and our identity.

11. How can we give up control of our health department to Lake County? The people there don't share our philosophy and may not share our approaches to important issues.

The Geauga Board of Health, appointed by elected Geauga officials, will continue to control our policies, programs and services. We're not giving up control of any of these important issues. The Lake County General Health District is serving as a staffing agency for Geauga Public Health. That's it.

12. Why didn't the Geauga Health District Advisory Council (HDAC) stop this?

The Board has had to make a number of difficult decisions over the past year-plus. In none of those situations, including the Lake County General Health District agreement, did the Board have a statutory obligation to contact HDAC. With this agreement, the Board is exercising its powers in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code and our bylaws.

We are facing a deficit of \$500,000 in the 2024 budget. The Board had a fiduciary duty to address these serious and urgent funding issues. Given our options – which included cutting services to our residents – we believe this agreement is innovative, efficient and best serves our residents.

13. Why did the Board get rid of the For Sale of Property (FSOP) septic inspection program? That hurt GPH's revenue.

The FSOP program had a three-year backlog, often forcing a property owner to lock up tens of thousands of dollars in escrow until the inspection was finally completed. The program also failed to meet the Ohio Department of Health's looming requirement for an Operation and Maintenance septic system program as set forth in Ohio law.

14. Why didn't the Board put an additional levy on the ballot?

It wasn't necessary. If the Board has an opportunity to save money without cutting services, it would be breaking our fiduciary duty to not pursue that opportunity.

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