In this issue of Health Matters, we take a look back at the progress we made in 2016 with our core initiatives, including the Medical Marijuana Program, opioid overdose outreach and education, seasonal flu prevention, and health innovation. We will be continuing our progress on these initiatives, and will be introducing some new projects as well. I encourage you to stay up to date on all Department of Health activities by reading our monthly newsletter.

With 2017 upon us, I’d like to wish each of you a safe and healthy New Year. The Department of Health is urging all Pennsylvanians to add easy health choices to their list of New Year’s resolutions, like: getting vaccinated; visiting a primary care provider regularly; making healthy food choices; being active; and getting enough sleep.

I’m looking forward to working with you in 2017 to continue making a difference for the health of all Pennsylvanians.

- Karen
2016 was a busy and productive year for the Department of Health.

To combat the opioid epidemic, we’ve worked collaboratively with other state agencies to develop new safe prescribing guidelines, we’ve successfully implemented the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), and we’ve expanded the distribution of naloxone to schools and first responders.

Our patient-focused Medical Marijuana Program has gathered input from the public and stakeholders to release several temporary regulations for growers/processors, laboratories, and dispensaries, and has recently announced that it will be accepting applications for grower/processor facilities and dispensaries beginning in February 2017.

The release of the Nursing Home Quality Improvement Task Force report has fostered plans to drastically revamp our nursing home oversight.

We’ve also worked to implement new school immunization regulations that reduce the period in which a child needs to receive standard vaccines from 8 months after the start of the school year to within the first five days of school.

Finally, we’ve worked with other agencies to reduce the spread of Zika in the commonwealth to great success. We look forward to an even more productive 2017.

Secretary Murphy spoke to nursing students at DeSales University in December to inform them about the current status of health care in Pennsylvania, particularly as it relates to the opioid epidemic. A registered nurse herself, Secretary Murphy provided a valuable resource for students looking to enter the field.
Medical Marijuana Program

In an important update to the Pennsylvania Medical Marijuana Program, the department announced that it will be accepting applications for growers/processors and dispensaries from February 20, 2017 until March 20, 2017. This marks an important milestone for the program as the department will be making decisions regarding the companies who will be producing and dispensing medical marijuana, as well as where those companies will have their facilities located.

The department will issue up to 12 permits for growers/processors and up to 27 permits for dispensaries, with each dispensary permit allowing for up to three locations.

Naloxone Awareness Pharmacy Events

Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine has been busy traveling to pharmacies across the commonwealth to encourage everyone to fill prescriptions for naloxone, a life-saving opioid overdose reversal drug, using her standing order.

These pharmacy visits serve a valuable purpose in raising awareness about how easy it is for everyone to acquire naloxone. They also play a valuable role in raising awareness for pharmacies regarding the standing order.

Dr. Levine plans to continue these visits in 2017.
Innovation

On Dec. 1, Innovation staff conducted a stakeholder meeting to discuss health care workforce reports produced by the Department of Health. This meeting, facilitated by the National Governors Association (NGA), included remarks from Hannah Maxey, the director of the Bowen Center for Health Workforce Research and Policy at the Indiana University School of Medicine. Dr. Maxey provided valuable insight on Indiana’s movement from basic reporting to sophisticated workforce data analyses.

The results of the day included further investigation into the following areas: improvement of workforce data dissemination, collaboration of resources across the department to meet federal requirements, and reporting of data to support research into emerging workforce issues in the commonwealth.

Public Health Seminar Series

Did you know that the Department of Health hosts bi-monthly seminars where academic and policy leaders present current scientific literature related to public health? The presentations can be attended in person in Conference Room 812 in the Health and Welfare Building or remotely via WebEx.

All seminars are free and open to department employees and our public health community partners. You can view the schedule for upcoming seminars here.

Flu Update – Get Your Flu Vaccine!

A couple of months into the flu season, flu activity has reached “widespread” status in PA according to the flu stats on the Department of Health website. It’s more important than ever to make sure you get your seasonal flu vaccine. The vaccine not only protects you from the flu, but it also helps protect those around you; the more people in a community get vaccinated, the less chance the flu has of spreading in that community.

Department of Health News Available Online

All DOH press releases can be found on the department’s website! Visit: www.health.pa.gov.

Like DOH on Facebook

Follow DOH on Twitter

Get the latest health news, updates and events on our social media pages!

facebook.com/pennsylvaniadepartmentofhealth

twitter.com/PAHealthDept