As we enter the month of May, the Department of Health has been as busy as ever. Last month, we celebrated Public Health Week; released the Prostate Cancer Task Force Report; recognized Donate Life Day; continued progress on the Medical Marijuana Program; and much more.

We have some important initiatives on the horizon as well. Warm weather means increased efforts to raise awareness and prevent diseases like Lyme and Zika. And we continue to move toward the creation of the new Department of Health and Human Services to reduce silos and better provide crucial services to residents across the commonwealth. As always, this newsletter will provide monthly updates on the status of these initiatives.

The Department of Health’s mission is to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent injury and disease, and to assure the safe delivery of quality health care for all commonwealth citizens. Together with our partners, we take steps forward every day to achieve that goal.

- Karen

**Unification Update**

As budget talks continue, the creation of the Department of Health and Human Services is beginning to come into greater focus. The Wolf Administration has created a new website dedicated to the new department. We encourage everyone to keep checking that website periodically for the most up-to-date information on the new department and its services.
Public Health Week Telehealth Event

On April 4, Secretary Murphy and Penn State Hershey Stroke Center Co-Director Dr. Ray Reichwein recognized National Public Health Week by demonstrating a simulated telehealth appointment in the Capitol Media Center. Telehealth is a collection of methods for enhancing health care, public health and health education delivery and support using telecommunications technologies.

During the event, Dr. Reichwein used the Penn State Hershey Stroke Center’s telemedicine technology to call a simulated patient and conduct a virtual check-up for post-stroke care. The check-up included several components that, until recently, were impossible without a physical office visit, such as reviewing a patient’s brain scan. Telehealth allows physicians like Dr. Reichwein to reach patients no matter where they live – which is especially important for rural areas, which often face shortages of doctors and specialists.

Donate Life Day Highlights

Friday, April 21, was Donate Life Day. To recognize this event, several Department of Health employees wore blue and green and encouraged their friends and family to register as organ, eye and tissue donors.

Nearly 8,000 men, women and children in Pennsylvania are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant, and one Pennsylvanian dies every 18 hours because an organ is not available. You can register as a donor or learn more about organ and tissue donation at www.donatelifepa.org.

Prostate Cancer Report

On April 6, Deputy Secretary for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Dr. Loren Robinson and several members of the Prostate Cancer Task Force unveiled the Prostate Cancer Task Force Report, which outlines recommendations for improving the health of Pennsylvania men. The report provides recommendations and suggested actions for improving prostate health in Pennsylvania. The areas of focus include surveillance, screening, diagnosis and treatment, education, survivorship, and policy.

Prostate cancer is one of the most common types of cancer in men, striking approximately one in six males. It is the second most common cancer death among males in Pennsylvania. Nationally, one man dies from prostate cancer approximately every 20 minutes. Prostate cancer that is detected early has a much greater chance of successful treatment.
Dr. Levine Continues Effort to Highlight Opioid Epidemic

The month of April saw Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine traveling the commonwealth raising awareness about the heroin and opioid epidemic and the Wolf Administration’s efforts to combat it.

On April 14, Dr. Levine teamed up with agricultural community leaders in Mifflintown to discuss the devastating effects of the epidemic on agricultural communities. Speakers for the event also included the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture’s Executive Director Hannah Smith-Brubaker and Mark Critz, Executive Director of Pennsylvania’s Rural Development Council.

Zika Tabletop Exercise

The Department of Health holds preparedness as a top priority. As the weather warms up, we are reminded once again about the public health threat, Zika. On April 7, the Department of Health held an exercise to bolster state and local preparedness and response plans for potential future cases of locally-transmitted Zika in the commonwealth. The exercise, held in southeast Pennsylvania, emphasized collaboration with partners from state agencies, local health departments, emergency medical services and other partners.

Nearly 5,200 Zika virus cases have been reported so far in the United States, with most cases occurring in travelers who have returned from infected areas. It’s important that anyone traveling to a Zika-affected area take appropriate precautions to stay safe and healthy.

Medical Marijuana Program

During the regular briefing of the status of Pennsylvania’s Medical Marijuana Program on April 26, Secretary Murphy provided an update on the application intake process for growers/processors and dispensaries and discussed steps moving forward for practitioner and patient regulations. The department received more than 500 application packages containing one or more facility applications in each package. The program is on track with its original timeline to get much-needed medication into the hands of patients in 2018. The list of the facility applications received and logged so far can be found here.