

DATE: July 27, 2006**SUBJECT:** Status of the Tennessee Institute of Public Health**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Information

The framework for the Tennessee Institute of Public Health (TNIPH) is being constructed according to best practices endorsed by the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI). The Tennessee Institute is a collaboration involving the Department of Health, the University of Tennessee, the Tennessee Board of Regents, and the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The purpose of the entity is to provide a state-wide, free-standing, not-for-profit mechanism whereby these institutional and agency partners can secure grants for sponsored research, promote public health initiatives, and provide public service and policy analysis.

Since being formalized through a March 2006 Memorandum of Agreement, considerable progress has been made in the organization of the Institute. Dr. Jo Edwards now serves as half-time interim director while continuing her role as chair holder of the Middle Tennessee State University Adams Chair of Excellence in Health Care Services and Director of the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services. Through Dr. Edwards' leadership, these steps have been made in the operation of the Institute:

- **October 27, 2006 conference.** Negotiations for a \$10,000 grant from Research America are being finalized to fund an event to introduce the Institute to potential stakeholders. A one-day conference, to be held in Nashville on October 27, will present the Institute to key leaders in Tennessee. The focus of the meeting will be "Advocating for Public Health in Tennessee." Research America is the nation's largest not-for-profit public education and advocacy alliance working to make research to improve health a higher national priority. Founded in 1989, Research America is supported by more than 500 member organizations that represent the voices of more than 125 million Americans. Their advocacy programs and publications reach the public and decision makers to help advance medical and health research.
- **Campus discussions on Institute agenda.** Campus visits are scheduled to enable THEC staff, Dr. Edwards, and institutional public health administration and faculty to identify the most productive research and service opportunities. The first of these visits is scheduled for August 8 with the East Tennessee State University Dean of the College of Public Health and others.
- **Health Needs Index.** A significant first "product" for the Institute has been defined through collaboration between the Department of Health and the THEC staff. This product is a health needs index by Tennessee county built according to a model developed by the State of Wisconsin as currently the only index of its kind. The index will use a number of factors affecting

health such as health outcomes, health care, health behaviors, socioeconomic factors and physical environment to evaluate the state of health in each county. The comprehensive nature of the index implies that data for the ratings will come from different venues, such as Department of Health, Department of Environment and Conservation, TN Bureau of Investigation, Department of Education and other sources. It is intended to become an annual publication of the Institute, and will allow counties to track their overall health status and their performance in select health indicators over the years and compare their status to that of other counties. While encouraging awareness among counties of relative health performance, the rankings are also expected to facilitate collaboration among counties facing similar challenges and exchange of successful health strategies. The health index is expected to be of use for a wide range of stakeholders, from the general public to county health officials to community partners. It is designed to facilitate clear understanding of a county's challenges and efficient use of resources.

- **National Network of Public Health Institutes membership.** Application is being made for membership in the NNPHI. This national organization was formed in 2001 to recognize and enhance the work being done in public health by independent, nonprofit collaborative entities. Tennessee is joining many other states that have formed these multi-sector organizations with their unique partnerships with government, the business community, academia, and other nonprofits. NNPHI members share certain characteristics of fostering innovation, creating efficient administrative structures, and reaching out to partners outside of the usual governmental arena. The network helps leverage resources of member institutes so they may learn from each other and enjoy the potential for joint ventures. Dr. Edwards attended the national meeting of NNPHI where she arranged meetings with 8 directors of institutes from other states to discuss their structure, authorization, funding streams and impact.
- **Public health work force inventory.** Based on an assessment by the Department of Health, 50 percent of the public health work force is expected to leave within the next five years. Efforts by Tennessee's institutions of higher education to initiate programs to replace this work force have been undertaken. Working with the Career Advancement Center, an inventory of existing and developing programs and career opportunities in public health is being developed.
- **Research and service inventory.** An inventory of research and service projects supporting public health at state universities is being created.
- **Dedicated web site for the Institute.** A web site for the institute is being planned. This site will accommodate easy access to the "County Rankings, Issue briefs, academic inventory, and the inventory of research and service in the area of public health.

The next steps for the Institute are to engage a Board of Directors and campus personnel in the development of a strategic plan to map research and service ambitions and funding acquisition strategies for the next five years. Part of the plan will be to seek legislative authorization or incorporation for the Institute.