

Date: May 20, 2016

To: Chair and Members of the Personnel and Finance Committee

From: Janel Heinrich, Director

Subject: Approval to hire Public Health Specialist – Health Impact Assessment

County Ordinance 29, 52(16) requires the Personnel and Finance Committee, along with the County Executive, to approve filling positions that are new or have been vacant longer than six months. I write to request approval to fill 1.0 FTE Public Health Specialist– Health Impact Assessment, P7. The 2016 Public Health budget includes this position with a projected hire date of summer 2016. We have reclassified position #2669 to create this new position. We have exceeded our vacancy savings goals for 2016.

[Wisconsin State Statute, Chapter 251.05](#) mandates local public health departments to conduct activities leading to community health improvement planning. Additional rules governing mandated community health assessment activities are found in Wisconsin [Department of Health Services Administrative Rules Chapter DHS 140.04](#). The mission of the Policy, Planning and Evaluation (PPE) Division is to support these functions and the overall work of Public Health Madison & Dane County. Personnel in PPE conduct public health data analysis and tracking, policy development, program guidance, and research evidence-based information to support and promote health equity. This unit performs activities including epidemiologic analysis, economic analysis, social and health policy analysis, program evaluation, and community capacity building.

**What is the nature of the work or what is the essential function of the position?**

One role of PPE is to support staff in City and County agencies, as well as assist community partners, to improve decision making in public policy, improving short-term and long-term health outcomes and reduce racial and ethnic health disparities in Dane County. Health Impact Assessment is a practical approach that uses data, research and stakeholder input to determine a policy or initiative's impact on the health of a population or specific populations who may be most affected by the policy decision. In practice, HIA is a useful way to ensure that health and health equity are considered in decision-making and to ensure that stakeholders are engaged in the process.

**What are some examples of complex public health challenges that would benefit from a Public Health Specialist skilled in Health Impact Assessment?**

Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) are used to understand and compare the impact of a wide range of policy options, helping improve and incorporate health considerations into decision-making processes. HIAs are used in many sectors including criminal justice, housing, land use, economic security and education. Following are a few examples:

- An HIA of options proposed in a neighborhood plan reveals low-cost, community-driven opportunities to significantly increase physical activity among residents
- A series of HIAs examines the health impact on specific populations and entities of paid sick leave legislation at the local, state and federal levels
- An HIA of a housing redevelopment compares the health implications of two alternative scenarios, revealing opportunities to shape the built environment to promote healthy aging
- An HIA examined the health implications of increasing funding for various substance abuse treatment alternatives in Wisconsin
- An HIA in Minnesota examined the health effects of payday lending reforms among specific populations

Results of conducting Health Impact Assessments:

- Identification of cost-effective, sustainable policy options that promote community health and well-being
- Changes in proposed developments that improve neighborhood housing and employment conditions
- Increased diversity in the perspectives involved in the policy-making process
- Changes to and expanded options for policy solutions that improve public health
- New and stronger collaborations between community organizations, public agencies and other stakeholders to make sure that health is considered throughout decision-making processes

Qualified candidates bring knowledge and skill in utilizing health impact assessment tools including screening, scoping, assessment, reporting, recommendations and monitoring in ongoing population health improvement efforts. This staff member will also act as lead facilitator for a variety of community engagement processes (i.e. leading interactions with citizens, developing relationships and providing meaningful engagement opportunities).

**How has this function been fulfilled during the vacancy?**

This is a new position and the justification statements above address this question.

**What will the impact be on the department's function and mission if the position remains vacant?**

County and City agency partners, health care systems and their affiliates, local community service providers regularly submit requests for data collection, analysis and interpretation to support improving health and quality of life goals. It is the role of the local health department to provide this information and support our community in achieving these goals, and the health department is uniquely positioned to provide this impartial review. The department cannot adequately address these requests given the few numbers of staff currently in the PPE Division. There are requests from various city

and county departments as well as other stakeholders (County Parks, County Board office, County Planning, Housing, Madison Fire Department, and MMSD) currently in the queue while we wait to return to staffing levels that provide us with the capacity to respond.

Additionally, PHMDC is preparing to seek accreditation which, if awarded, will boost the standing and, potentially, the funding of our local health department. In order to plan and execute the accreditation process, we need to have a variety of staff with different skills to support these efforts by managing and leading the mandated Community Health Assessment (CHA) and the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) processes. The CHA and the CHIP are the roadmaps which will guide our population health improvement efforts over the next 5 years. This position will also play a role in these efforts.

Thank you for your help in filling this important position in PHMDC. Please let me know if you need any additional information.