

*Although perhaps not as glamorous as an episode of the West Wing, making effective public policy is critical and ultimately can bring tremendous rewards. In Illinois, determination and strategy are the name of the game. After all, how can you advance health without an agreed upon plan for action?*

# Illinois Turning Point

## Advancing Public Health in the Policy Arena

Turning Point in Illinois lives within the Illinois Public Health Futures Institute. Led by director Elissa Bassler and with a dynamite steering committee, the Institute built on planning efforts from Illinois Turning Point and drafted legislation for ongoing State Health Improvement Planning. The “SHIP Act” would legislate creation of a task force composed of the governor’s office, state agencies, and private sector entities to complete the first Statewide Health Improvement Plan by January 1, 2005. Using National Performance Standards and evaluating Illinoisans’ health against Healthy People 2010 goals, the task force’s recommendations would be based on evidence and would ensure that looming threats and existing health issues are reflected in new initiatives.

The broad-based partnership responsible for conceiving and drafting the SHIP Act ensured



All indications were that the widely supported bill would be enacted, but the Institute’s determination was tested. Governor Rod Blagojevich vetoed the legislation, citing existing initiatives to develop interagency coordination on health and the potential costs involved in creating a task force and a health improvement plan, especially in light of a budget shortfall. For the Institute and the bill’s supporters, this was a surprising setback.

However, faith in the policy process led the partnership back to examining the Act and strategizing next steps. They were not ready to give up and live with the status quo.

Not to be undone by one defeat, the Institute is moving forward with a new strategy: it is working to implement SHIP by tying together and enhancing a number of existing initiatives. Recently, the bill again passed the Illinois House unanimously and the Institute and the Blagojevich Administration have developed new parameters for the bill which will ensure the Governor’s signature once the bill makes its way through the General Assembly process. The partnership engaged new allies, raised the Institute’s profile in the legislative arena and with the administration, and demonstrated the capacity of a collaborative effort to generate overwhelming legislative support for public health improvement activities.

Public health’s future relies more and more in successful partnering, educating the public, and assisting our governmental representatives to protect the public’s health through law. As Illinois demonstrates, health policy setbacks aren’t the end of the road. They push us to learn to work within politics to improve health.

**The broad-based partnership responsible for conceiving and drafting the SHIP Act ensured that it was thorough and well prepared. SHIP found unanimous support from a variety of usually contentious groups. When the time came, it was unanimously passed by both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly.**

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# At a Glance: *Illinois*



## Aim of Illinois Turning Point

In Illinois, Turning Point is known as the Illinois Public Health Futures Institute (IPHFI). IPHFI is a partnership of public, private, and voluntary organizations. It works through partnerships to promote prevention and improve public health systems that maximize health and quality of life for the people of Illinois. Housed within the independent, nonprofit UnitedWay of Illinois, IPHFI is in a position to provide not only training and resources to community-based groups, but also to represent the interests of public health on the policy level.

## Illinois's Public Health Challenges

Illinois's ten leading causes of death resulted in more than 84,000 deaths in 2000. Many of those causes, including heart disease, cancer, accidents, diabetes, and liver disease are strongly associated with lifestyle and social factors. As many as half of those deaths could have been prevented. Illinois's efforts to improve health are fragmented among multiple state agencies and across the private and nonprofit sectors. Local partnerships vary greatly in their resources and capabilities.

### What does IPHFI's Partnership Look Like?

IPHFI actively engages a variety of partners from a variety of sectors:

- Minority health groups
- Academia
- Rural health
- Hospitals
- Physicians' groups
- Social service
- State and local health departments

## IPHFI's Contribution to Improving Public Health

IPHFI is implementing the following strategies to improve public health systems:

- Engaging a broad range of public health interest groups to identify and address gaps and weaknesses in the public health system
- Mobilizing collective action to advocate at the policy level for improved public health policies and expanded resources for the unique needs of the people of Illinois
- Educating the public and policy makers on the complex, primary causes of poor health and strategies to address them
- Supporting the development of local community health partnerships through training, technical assistance, and policy development
- Assembling and disseminating data on the health of the public to promote understanding of Illinois's health status and system challenges and to support planning and policy development

## For More Information

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