



CREATING A VISION FOR A HEALTHIER MONTANA:

# Introducing the Strengthening Montana's Public Health System Study

## Background

Beginning with its first-ever grant in 2015, the Montana Healthcare Foundation (the Foundation) has been working with tribal, state, and county public health departments to strengthen Montana's public health system. Building on this work, in July 2017 the Foundation convened a series of discussions with public health practitioners who have helped identify a number of core needs for building a strong, effective public health system. Based on these discussions, the Foundation decided to support a study entitled, "The Strengthening Montana's Public Health System Study." The study aims to identify specific strategies to improve the health of Montanans through strengthening the public health system. Results of the study are expected by April, 2019.



## Collaborators

The Foundation is working in conjunction with public health stakeholders, a project steering committee, and a consultant team including the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) and Jane Smilie, Population Health Partners to assist with this work.

## Study Objective

The study aims to explore actions that could be taken to:

- Strengthen existing public health organizations, and improve coordination among them and with other health leadership groups, and
- Possibly, develop a Montana public health institute (PHI). PHIs are non-profit organizations dedicated to advancing public health practice and making systematic improvements in population health through multi-sector collaboration.



## Methodology

The study will employ a mix of research methodologies, including:

- Regional roundtable meetings were held in September 2018 to hear about needed and desired health system improvements, and to understand how stakeholders from local communities and governments, and health, human service and community-based organizations believe those improvements can best be achieved.
- An extensive review of documents and on-line resources describing the health conditions, health behaviors, social determinants of health, as well as public health and health system improvements that have been prioritized in our state. This review will include a review of the capacities, strategic objectives and funding of Montana's existing public health organizations.
- Semi-structured interviews with leaders from health organizations and stakeholder groups.
- Research into effective public health system models in rural/frontier states and development of case studies.
- Site visits to two states that have public health institutes or other backbone entities that work in tandem with other health organizations.
- Research into the financial feasibility of creating a public health institute.

## Recommendations

This study will result in a blueprint that includes:

- Options for strengthening the effectiveness of the existing public health organizations, including strategies for increasing coordination among them and with multi-sector partners such as education and transportation, and
- The potential roles, relationships and sustainability for a public health institute. The blueprint will describe how, if determined to be a feasible option, a PHI could add valuable support and services to the current public health infrastructure.