

The Role of Organizational Theory and Behavior in the Office of Family Health Services
within the Virginia Department of Health

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PSPA 5020 Final Project

March 10, 2013

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Research

Evolution of the Office of Family Health Services within the Virginia Department of Public Health

Public Health has a very long history in Virginia. For five centuries the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has been making regulations and doing studies to improve the health of state residents, from Jamestown, 1610, when the first sanitation laws were passed to the 17th century when the first regulations for the collection of vital records and the practice of medicine. Today's thirty-five health districts began in the 18th century with the first city charter and board of health (Lake, 2004).

Before the creation of the existing system of local offices and districts, different parts of the state did not have access to basic public health services such as vaccines. The focus on vaccines began in the 19th century (Lake, 2004) to become what is now today a department of preventative measures that in February 2013 released a new screening project that indicates heart disease early in infants (VDH, 2011). Also in the 19th century, the first state board of health was created. Today the board of health members and the state health commissioner are appointed directly by the governor and oversee the implementation of a "prevention-oriented program that promotes and protects the health of all Virginians" (VDH, 2011).

In the last five centuries the health of citizens in Virginia has been a primary focus of the department of health. Today, the Office of Family Health Services within the VDH is in charge of the programs that strengthen the health of families and communities across the state. The mission of this dynamic office is to provide the leadership, expertise and resources to these programs. Figure 1 shows the organization of the VDH and where the Office of Family Health Services is in the hierarchy of the organization. With the leadership of this specific office, the

VDH is able to help residents reach and maintain a level of optimal health throughout their life. Through programs and research the VDH hopes to become a major health organization in the 21st century (VDH, 2011).

The goals of the Office of Family Health Services focus on becoming a resource and a hub for health care for Virginia residents. It aims to be an objective and reliable resource for public health information, evaluation and health status indicators (VDH, 2011). According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), from which the VDH gets a large chunk of their funding, a health status indicator is a key health indicator about a community's health. These indicators include data such as, age, weight, height, and causes of death, infectious disease, and access to care (Community Health Status, 2009).

Another goal of the Office of Family Health Services (the Office) is to enable their partners, private or public; to deliver the highest quality of clinical, preventive and community based care. The office does this through partnering with local district offices as well as by overseeing the many programs that are monitored by the office. Among the 35 districts around the state, there is at least one service delivery site in each city and county. Each district is led by a physician director and managed by a team of nurse, environmental and business managers. The services in each district vary in order to meet the needs of the specific locality (Lake, 2004).

The Office also strives to improve the availability and affordability of health care services. It does this through the many different statewide programs that each separate part of the office maintains. A comprehensive list of the different offices and the programs they monitor can be found in Figure 2. As you can see, the multitude of different programs enables the Office to reach almost every resident and offer them affordable health care. From the maternity programs for new mothers to cancer prevention and screening programs for the elderly, there is a program

available for each resident in need. Although an impressive and extensive list, the Office still strives to improve and close gaps in services throughout the state.

Finally, the Office makes every effort to improve health outcomes by addressing the causes of mortality and morbidity. By compiling data from each local district, a bigger picture can be drawn. Analysis of the data provided enables the Office to target programs and improve their effectiveness. Without data from each locale, the state would not be able to pinpoint where the needs of individuals are and thus, would not be able to reach and help as many residents as it currently does.

Within the Office of Family Health Services there are 4 different divisions. Figure 2 shows the 4 different divisions and the programs they are in charge of monitoring. The first is Prevention and Health Promotion. This part of the Office ensures the promotion of healthy lifestyles. By offering training, consultations, education and support for community programs, Prevention and Health Promotion is able to help prevent chronic disease, injury, suicide and violence. Programs such as Child Passenger Safety, WiseWoman and Suicide Prevention are all a part of Prevention and Health Promotion. The Child Passenger Safety program is training for health-care professionals that may assist with educating parents when infants are discharged from the hospital. This program teaches the best practices in child passenger safety. Underneath this program is also a Low-Income Safety Seat Distribution and Education for those Virginia residents that cannot afford a safety seat for their child. WiseWoman is a CDC funded program that provides low-income or uninsured 40-64 year old women with education on how to improve their diet and physical activity in order to prevent, delay or control chronic diseases. The Suicide Prevention program coordinates training across the state for school personnel, human service providers and communities on suicide prevention, intervention and identification of persons at-

risk of suicide. Although just a brief list of a few of the programs underneath the division of Prevention and Health Promotion, it is easy to see how the all-encompassing the Office of Family Health Services within the VDH is one of the most important to the residents of the state.

The second division of the Office is Community Health. This division includes programs such as the WIC program and the Summer Food Service Program. WIC stands for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. The program aims to improve the health of pregnant women, infants and children under 5 years old. To achieve this goal, the program provides everything from nutrition education to counseling at WIC clinics and breastfeeding promotion and support. The Summer Food Service Program sponsors organizations to provide meals and snacks to lower income children during the summer. This program is provided by federal funding and operates through schools, camps and private non-profit organizations (Summer Food, 2013). This division focuses quite a bit on nutrition programs for children. Without it, many families in the state of Virginia would struggle to have enough food, much less nutritious food.

The third division in the Office is Child and Family Health. This division aims to improve the health of women, children and pays attention to the most underserved populations in Virginia. Programs under this umbrella include Bright Futures Virginia and Dental Clinic Programs. Bright Futures promotes and tries to improve the health, education and well being of children and families. The program carries out this mission by being a hub of research and information on topics such as childcare, child development and health related topics (Bright Futures, 2011). The Web site fosters partnerships within communities with instructional videos (Healthy Futures, 2009). Dental clinics are provided by the VDH throughout the state for

children for free or at a reduced price. Parents can bring their children to health clinics or trailers set up on school property to get their total dental care (VDH Dental Clinical, 2012).

Finally, the division of Policy and Evaluation within the Office of Family Health Services provides support for each of the divisions, manages surveillance and research for publications and programs and assists local health departments with logistics, programs and services. This division is in charge of the Virginia Youth Survey and the Virginia Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS). The Virginia Youth Survey is provided by a grant from the CDC and the Department of Health and gathers information about health risk behaviors of youth. These behaviors are known to contribute to death, disability and social problems. By surveying this information the VDH can learn what risk factors youth have for developing these issues and can be researching programs to prevent it. PRAMS is a survey of mothers who have recently given birth. The program helps reduce infant mortality and morbidity by asking information about a woman's experiences before, during and after pregnancy.

The Dynamic Context of the Office of Family Health Services

Organizational Environment

In a public organization such as the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) there are lots of different environments that have the ability to influence the inner workings. Political conditions play a large role in a state organization. Although the mission and overall goals of the organization do not change, political offices such as the governor have influence on the programs within the office that are funded, cut or in need of improvement. For example, the political party in office currently supports abstinence programs. The result is focus on the abstinence programs in Virginia through the Department of Health. A different political party may have a different view of abstinence and may not wish to fund such programs.

Economic conditions also have a large impact on a government office such as the VDH. In today's economy, all organizations, government included, must tighten their belts and operate more efficiently. The public wants the same programs provided despite a change in budgets for the programs. In the current times, economic constraints play a significant role in public organizations. Government offices and departments must find other ways to provide programs efficiently and effectively with less money.

For the VDH, demographics are also a large environmental influence. The service area for the VDH covers the entire state of Virginia. The State has very diverse communities from coastal beaches, to remote mountain areas to densely populated cities and thus, very diverse demographics. These diverse demographics require diverse health focuses. In order to reach all Virginia residents, state-wide programs must be broad and diverse so that someone who lives in the mountains in rural parts of Virginia can benefit just as much as someone living in a coastal beach city. As Rainey (2009) states, "Government often performs services crucial to individuals or to an entire jurisdiction. People want the job done; efficiency is often a secondary concern." This highlights the intricacies of the different environments government offices have to wrestle with. Not only does the VDH need to provide services across their diverse jurisdiction, but they must do it efficiently because of budget constraints.

Different cultures have different traditions values and beliefs that influence their health as well. An immigrant vegetarian from India can benefit from health information videos just as a 6th generation beef farmer would. Both cultures are at different ends of the spectrum in terms of nutrition and health, however, both are able to utilize a program within the VDH and find it helpful and informative.

Role of Political Power and Public Policy

Being a large government organization, the VDH is subject to influences from political offices and the public. The state-run office has several governor-appointed positions such as the commissioner and the entire Board of Health for the state of Virginia. These positions are high-ranking positions that are capable of influence programs, funding and almost all aspects of the VDH. Elected officials are able to also initiate legislation and policies that will, ultimately, could affect the programs within the health department. In Virginia, the legislative body, the General Assembly, is in charge of the budget, approving executive appointments and initiating new legislation. Since the VDH is a government organization, all of these political influences have the potential to weigh heavily on the functionality, efficiency and effectiveness of the programs available to the public.

Not only is the VDH a government organization but also an organization for the public. Rainey (2009) states, "Two types of mass opinion figure importantly: attitudes toward government in general and attitudes toward particular policies and agencies." This particular type of organization serves the government and it's it elected officials, as ell as being held accountable by its clients, the public. The above quote from Rainey is a great example of the many different ways political and public policy come into play with the VDH. Since the VDH is a government agency as part of the government by the public. When public opinion of the government is diminished, the abilities and programs of the VDH are also diminished. Thus there can be several different avenues of influence. There are those in the government who oversee and make policies within the health department, there is the public who sees the health department as part of the government and develops their opinion based on that, and there is the

public who utilizes the health department and its programs. Each of these important parts of both the public and political world is vital to the VDH.

Key Dimensions of Organizing and Managing the Office of Family Health Services

Organizational Goals and Effectiveness

The goals of the Office of Family Health Services are a variety of important future markers. When reading over the goals above, you automatically see the vagueness and broad reaching goals such as enhancing availability and affordability, improving health outcomes and establishing the Office. It is also apparent that a few are conflicting as it is often difficult to deliver the highest quality of care at affordable prices, especially in healthcare. And third, you find that some could be considered short-term, such as enhancing the availability and addressing significant causes of morbidity and mortality and some goals are more long term, such as establishing the Office as a reliable resource for objective public health information. It is important for a large government organization to have these broad goals in order to meet the needs of each citizen. Goals that are too specific leave important demographics out, however goals that are not specific enough can be cumbersome and unmanageable.

The effectiveness of the Office can be measured by its effectiveness, productivity and their management of information. The Office is able to reach millions of people in need across the state and it is only able to do that because it is effective at running and implementing its programs. All across the state of Virginia programs run simultaneously at local health departments. These programs are maintained and managed by the Office of Family Health Services and it is a testament to how efficient the Office is. Not only are they able to run each of these programs well and serve millions across the state, but also able to collaborate with other non-profit organizations, federal health departments and other organizations that utilize their

research and information to develop more public programs. Within the Office many different types of data are collected, utilized and shared in order to ensure the public is getting programs that best suit their needs.

Understanding the Organizations People

Teamwork, Communication and Conflict

As you can see from Figure 2, the Office of Family Health Services within the Virginia Department of Health has quite a vast range of services that it provides. Working with many different health officials, government officials, local health departments and the general public calls for quite a bit of teamwork and excellent communication skills. The potential for conflict and frustration is no doubt, high. Although the Office oversees the programs, the local health departments in the 35 districts of Virginia carry out each program. Making sure each locale is adhering to state guidelines and providing accurate information to the Office in a timely manner can be a management headache. Teamwork is an essential aspect to the Office, without which all entities could crumble.

With budget cuts, an eye on efficiency and the need for better, leaner programs the Office finds itself able to branch out and partner with other non-profit and private organizations in order to meet the needs of the Virginia public. Having clear rules and regulations, clear and open communication is key to making these partnerships happen. Many programs are funded and run in conjunction with the federal government and the CDC but can be carried out by other non-profit organizations with the oversight of the VDH. One such program would be the Summer Food Service Program. This program is federally funded and run by the VDH, however different organizations such as camps, schools, sports programs and non-profit organizations are able to implement the programs. This efficiently run program ensures that 2 million children a day are

served throughout the nation. Without the collaboration between the federal and state health departments as well as the organizations implementing the programs, those 2 million meals would not be possible. The ability of the Office to work together and effectively communicate is proven by the fact that programs are run consistently throughout the state with efficiency.

Each of these separate parts of the Office of Family Health Services is essential in being able to bring the public the health services they so desperately need. Within this office we are able to see what an efficient and effective government office that serves the public is like. By just scratching the surface we get a good idea of how important a government office such as this one is and how difficult it is to run one. Bringing services to the public is not an easy task but an essential one.

Interview

An interview with Christopher Hill, MPH, CPH was conducted to shed more light on the Office of Family Health Services. Hill is the Maternal and Child Health Lead Epidemiologist and Interim Virginia PRAMS Coordinator within the Division of Policy and Evaluation in the Office of Family Health Services. The interview took place over the phone on March 7th, 2013 at 11AM.

As the lead epidemiologist, Hill describes his work for the VDH as collecting and analyzing data. From birth to age 20, residents of Virginia have ongoing data about their health that is collected and analyzed. This data can be used to strengthen existing projects and improve the populations the VDH serves. For the PRAMS program, Hill manages the statewide data collection process as well as the data. Hill also describes a part of his job as gauging how the programs are working and works with programs individually to gather the information they need to help improve their implementation.

After receiving a Bachelors of Science degree in Biology and Biochemistry from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Geneseo, Hill proceeded to get his Masters in Public Health from SUNY Albany. After working in Albany for some time, Hill moved to Wyoming where he also worked in the state health department. Here he was able to take courses on leadership and interpersonal communications through Colorado State University (CSU) at Fort Collins. Hill earned a few certificate programs at CSU. While working for various states he was able to take training courses with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). HRSA is a federal agency that helps to improve access to health services for low-income and uninsured residents of the U.S. (About HRSA, 2013). Hill stated that he has also been fortunate enough to be able to take training

courses through the CDC as well. He added that he has been able to do both the HRSA and CDC training programs because each of these organizations provides funding to the programs within his office of the VDH.

As an analyst, much of Hill's job requires him to collect various types of data. Through the PRAMS project he surveys new mothers all over the state. Also available for him to utilize are government vital records, data from the CDC, data from outreach programs in different offices that the state performs and data from various other state programs. As an analyst and epidemiologist, all of this data is essential in order for Hill to be able to perform his job requirements.

Since data collection is one of his main functions, Hill says that various different statistical data analysis programs are used for analysis. Hill states that the most frequent programs he uses are SAS and ArcGIS. SAS is a versatile traditional statistical software program that Hill spoke highly of. ArcGIS is software tool for spatial data exploration and, according to Hill, is able to show map statistics for the state of Virginia.

When speaking of important skills necessary to his position, Hill states that a fastidious, detail-oriented individual is needed. He describes a person who has a love of data and is willing to be patient with the data in order to see what it is indicating. Hill says a person must be willing to work through the rough spots and be patient in order to see exactly what the data is showing. As his office is large and monitors many different programs across the state, Hill says it is also important to have great interpersonal relations because you are working with various types of personalities and values.

As a dedicated public health analyst, Hill finds his impact in the numbers. In the last 5-6 years teen pregnancy in Virginia has decreased as well as infant mortality. To Hill, this proves

the depth of the impact he is making in black and white. However, he also describes the qualitative data as an important piece of his impact as well. From reading the comments section in the many surveys he collects, he is able to discover how important the programs he manages are to the public. He says often times he reads that a program or service has been an individuals “saving grace” and without these programs it would not be possible for the individual to be where they are today.

When asked what he felt was different or unique about working in a public organization, Hill replied that he was a steward of the public trust. Not only does he report to his supervisor but he is also reporting to every resident of the commonwealth. He mentions that he essentially has “18 million bosses.” Hill describes public organizations as transparent and adds that each of his work processes is transparent as well.

Budget cuts and fiscal constraints, Hill states, are huge obstacles to overcome. As a state agency, the General Assembly sets the rules and the budget. Hill describes the feeling of being able to meet as many needs as possible, but not all of them. This does, however, open up new doors and offer different opportunities. In order for the VDH to work within these budget constraints, Hill says they have been forced to become more lean, mean and creative in the implementation of programs. By working with other organizations they have been able to open new doors to new communities and more creative ways to serve them. In the past few years there has been an entire administration change within the VDH, Hill says. This has given rise to the opportunity to educate and provide more information to the “new blood”. Hill describes this “new blood” as more flexible, having new views and new motivation for the future of the VDH.

This fiscal year, Hill says, he anticipates having major issues with everything. The General Assembly for 2013 ended in the last month and Hill says funding was cut again.

Although new and creative ways to provide services to the population have come about, still there are continuous budget cuts.

Hill states that the biggest change he has seen since he has been there has been the administration change. He states that the entire reorganization process finished about 6 months ago. This new administration change has made the organization go from a siloed administration to one that is more open. This new open administration is better able to work within the fiscal constraints because it fosters collaboration with outside organizations in order to meet the public needs.

Chuckling, Hill states that a professional who is detail oriented would be a great person to take his job in the 21st century. Hill describes a person who is enthusiastic and interested in data and what it has to say. A person with a considerable degree of flexibility, dynamic and is able to see the uniqueness of Virginia residents. Important personal qualities that Hill believes would help make a great candidate for the job are dedication, intelligence and an open mind. He says he would be interested in finding someone who is interested in improving their health and well being, as well as others.

The aspects that Hill believes are most significant are that the VDH is moving forward, is adapting and is putting their best foot forward. Hill explains that often times he is out with friends and when he tells them what they do, they moan and say government bureaucrat. Hill says that government offices are no longer that way but are still perceived as such.

Hill reiterates that the government can't focus in on one specific thing. It has to have broad reaching goals and be large and encompassing in order to meet the needs of its diverse public. Because the government takes up the mantle of pursuing all these different entities, it still has to be able to adapt, move forward and be dynamic and creative in its ideas.

In the final few minutes of the interview Hill said that it is above all, important to believe in the project you are working on. Hill illustrates this point with the fact that if you got on an elevator in the VDH and asked anyone at any point of the day why they were working there, they would tell you it is because they believe in their project and are passionate about what they are doing. Hill states that no one in his building comes to work just to receive a paycheck. He says that everyone is here because they believe they are working for the greater good.

As a student still learning the ropes of public administration, it is most inspiring to hear Hill's answers to the last few questions. With this interview I was able to gain a better understanding of what it is like to be a part of a government organization and found that it is not as different from being a part of a non-profit organization as I had initially thought. Being centered on the mission and believing in the project you are working on are core aspects to a non-profit organization but, until now, I had not considered them to be the cornerstone of government offices as well.

It was very refreshing to hear that the VDH was working hard to collaborate with outside organizations in order to serve the public and become "meaner and leaner." The concept of collaborating and working with multiple outside sources has been intriguing and I am interested in learning how to manage such large projects and how to creatively incorporate them all into a cohesive program. In short, the interview with Hill solidified my studies in public administration thus far, and left me interested in finding out more.

Integration

The Office of Family Health Services within the Virginia Department of Health is a dynamic and very efficient office. As Drucker (1980) states, “No one can guarantee the performance of a public service program, but we know how to ensure non-performance with absolute certainty.” In the studies of Rainey and the initial research of the Office, it was anticipated that there would be more hindrances to the process of implementing their programs than not. In truth, it is quite the opposite.

Although environments such as political conditions, economic conditions, demographics and various cultures can be challenging to overcome, they needn't be large immobile obstacles. Political and economic conditions, especially in today's world, are enormous obstacles in the face of any public organization. Although it may seem like these constraints are plotting to hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of organizations, they are, in fact, just trying to find a better way. In this dynamic 21st century, it can seem like the entire world is out to ensure you fail, however, these challenges are meant to open your mind and find a new, better and creative way to accomplish tasks we have been accomplishing for centuries. As the Office of Family Health Services has shown, there are many ways to overcome these gigantic obstacles, incorporate all of the environments necessary and still be able to reach just as many people or more. Brudney, Hebert and Wright (1999) found that “state efforts to accomplish structural reform...appear to facilitate implementation of reinvention reforms.” This finding can be applied here because it implies that the Office, since it has reformed and continues to change, can be a guide to other organizations in helping them reform. By setting an example of how collaborations can be done, the Office can show other government offices and public

organizations that the challenges of outside environments can also be a creative opening and enable you to reform, revitalize and become more efficient and effective.

Political power and policies do not always have to be roadblock. As with the Office, more budget cuts and more budget cuts come each year with the General Assembly and it is increasingly difficult to reach as many people as necessary in order to be effective. This does not have to necessarily be a bad thing. As Kettl (2000) states, we see a trend toward a “hollow state” in which the government or organization provides essential services through indirect workers. Although the Office is not at that point, it has managed to proceed in that direction with superb effectiveness. In the interview with Hill, it was clear to see that the Office oversaw and maintained the multitude of programs it has, however, most of the implementation of those programs was done outside the office by different organizations. This method of overseeing and not managing the day to day operations has proved quite effective for the Office and should be a model for how other offices can create such a dynamic.

Another integral part of the effectiveness of the Office is the set of goals they aim to accomplish. The goals they have chosen have many different elements as we have seen. However, a Rainey and Chun (2005) found in their study, there are ambiguous goals because the VDH is funded by the public. Private organizations are able to have more succinct goal because they are funded by those believe in their mission and goals. Because the VDH serves so many people and is funded by the public, it needs to have more ambiguous goals that allow leeway in their interpretation.

Teamwork and communication have proven to be one of the most valuable components of the Office and it’s administration. Only through collaborating with different organizations would the Office be able to implement its vital programs.

Having those individuals who are motivated to work as a team and be a part of an integral project has proven to be another important aspect. As Hill stated, each person working for the VDH believes in the program they are working for. Working for a government agency, as well as a nonprofit, does not mean that you come to work looking for your paycheck. Inevitably the mission of the organization draws you. In her article, 'The Value of Mission Statements in Public Agencies (1999),' Weiss states that, "mission statements can also communicate organizational values to employees in ways that engage their commitment and encourage them to identify with the organization." This statement indicates that the mission statement alone can be a motivating factor for individuals in public organizations. How many people are called to help others and participate in a program they believe in because they agree with their mission. In public administration, this is at the heart of motivation, management and effectiveness. Without effective employees who believe in what they are doing, an organization is nowhere. To be able to creatively strive to overcome obstacles and serve more people, an organization needs to have dedicated workers who are motivated to fulfill the mission and goals of the organization.

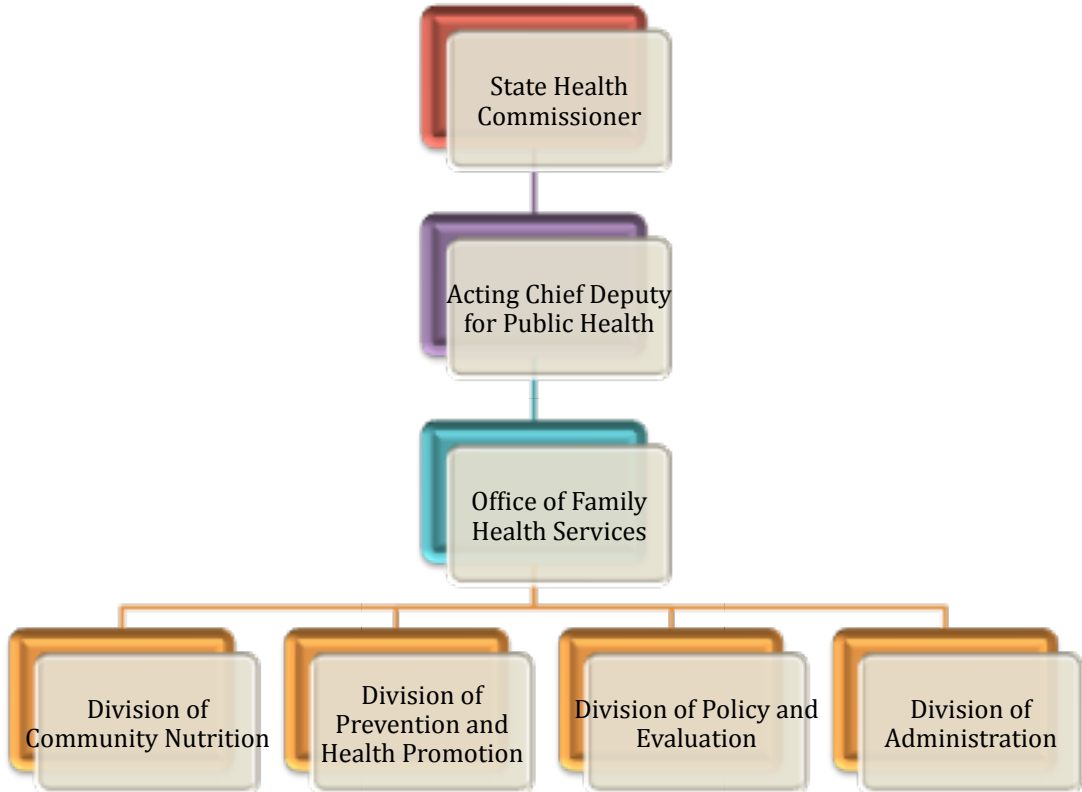
The Office of Family Health Services within the Virginia Department of Health may be a small part in the vast government of the U.S. but it is a dynamic and exceptional part of it as well. As daunting as it may seem, the Office has found a way to implement programs across one of the most diverse states in an effective manner and still be able to improve, analyze and tighten up their budget.

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State Health Commissioner

Acting Chief Deputy for Public Health

Office of Family Health Services

Division of Community Nutrition

Division of Prevention and Health Promotion

Division of Policy and Evaluation

Division of Administration

**Office of
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