

# Telling Missouri's Public Health Stories



## Staff-Sharing Model Ensures Quality Public Health Service Delivery

When Dade County Health Department lost its public health nurse, administrator Pam Allen wrestled with a tough decision. Would she have to eliminate some public health services to her 7,600 county residents? The health department is funded through a 0.0924 mil tax, one of the lowest in Missouri.

“We don’t have the money to keep someone full-time,” says Allen, “and most professionals can’t work just two days a week.”

Past experience with a temporary agency left her reluctant to try that route again, so she turned to one of her neighbors.



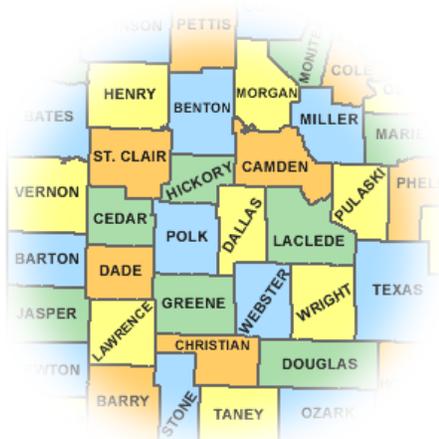
Michelle Morris, administrator of the Polk County Health Center, was glad to help. Morris provided one of her employees part-time on a contract basis to fill the gap.

“It’s hard to find someone with these professional skills willing to work part-time,” says Morris. “We’re able to hire the employee with full-time status and benefits, and our partners get access to high quality, trained staff. It’s a win-win for everyone.”

“Her partnership is a blessing for me,” says Allen. “I don’t know what I’d do without it. I would probably have to eliminate programs. It would change a lot of things.”

Polk County Health Center currently provides Dade County with a part-time WIC Nutritionist and a Nurse Practitioner, ensuring residents in this rural community can still receive vital local public health services.

“This is what we need to do as local public health agencies,” says Morris. “In order to retain the highest quality people, we need to offer benefits. It helps build infrastructure at the local level and keeps our profession moving forward.”



Polk County also partners with health departments in St. Clair, Cedar, Dallas, Hickory and Webster counties, providing public health nursing staff, WIC staff, and environmental public health staff.

“We basically have three different scenarios,” explains Morris. “We provide a long-term contract for WIC and environmental services. We offer staff to fill extended staffing gaps. We also provide services on an as-needed basis, such as employee illness or vacations.”

Cheryl Eversole is the administrator of the Dallas County Health Department. She says having a staff-sharing option helps with planning and scheduling, but it also offers much more.

“When one of our WIC employees had an unexpected surgery followed by a month-long recovery, I knew that I could gap-fill with our staff-sharing partners. This helped with continuity of operations with minimal disruption.”

Morris has developed the staff-sharing business model over the past seven to eight years. Her organization hires the staff and provides benefits and training. Contract agencies pay the employee’s salary and benefits only for the hours worked in their county. They also cover mileage for the employee to and from Polk County. Employees maintain an 8:00 – 5:00 schedule, including drive time. They wear a Polk County Health Center name badge, but they represent both health departments.

“We’ve had very few issues,” says Morris. “We’ve had to be more flexible because of the number of staff we maintain and do some cross-training to fill needs here in Polk County, and we’ve worked to train staff in other counties to a higher level and explored how to utilize staff in different ways. Everybody’s got to be willing to be flexible and work together.”

She says she believes the staff-sharing model is vital to building and maintaining a strong public health infrastructure in Missouri.

“We need to do it to ensure quality of care in our area, and that’s the driving force behind it.”



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The #HealthierMO initiative is seeking more stories like this one that demonstrate how partners in Missouri’s greater public health system are working together to transform the future of public health in our state and offer every resident the opportunity for a healthier life. If you have a story to share, message us on Facebook @HealthierMO or email Communications Coordinator Jaci McReynolds at [jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org](mailto:jmcreynolds@healthiermo.org). Learn more about the initiative and how you can get involved at [HealthierMO.org](http://HealthierMO.org) or on Facebook @[HealthierMO](https://www.facebook.com/HealthierMO) or Twitter [@aHealthierMO](https://twitter.com/aHealthierMO).