

Christopher Atchison – IPHA President (1994-1995)

The newsletters were helpful to remember what we were doing at the time, thanks for that. Of course, my presidency of IPHA was while I was state health director and President of ASTHO so what we were working on at the time is consequently a blended blur. I do know that we were, as one of the articles relates, working hard to make sure that health reform included population focused and disease prevention related elements. Phil Lee, the Assistant Secretary for Health at the time, was a solid advocate for this and PH did make it in the ill fated federal legislation.



Accompanying federal reform, the field of public health was defining itself. The report “Public Health in America” was produced listing not only the Ten Essential Services, which remain unchanged to this day, but a list of the reasons why everyone relies on public health services. You can see a version of these reasons in the current Modernization plan for Iowa’s public health system. The movement toward a sense of the field of public health led us to develop a document, called the “Public Health Charter” which spoke of this public trust in more detailed terms. Led by our state and local Liaison Committee, including Larry Barker, Keith Erickson, and Jennifer Lightbody, we strove to bring to the attention of local officials what public health stood for. I remember a meeting, though not the time or the place, when the then chair of the Polk County Board of Supervisors, Martha Willits, agreed to sign the charter. That was a moment I was proud of, but it was the culmination of the work we began in the post flood years of 94 and 95.

Of course, so much of this work continues to this day. Public health leaders continue to speak out about the need to focus on health disparities and wellness as policymakers craft health reforms. We continue to wrestle with how we can coordinate services, today through models like medical homes. We still see the need for funding and workers to meet demand surges caused by diseases such as influenza. In that way, not much has changed. Well I notice more gray hair now, but that’s about it.