

## Board of Health

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### **1. Tell us about yourself and how your experiences will make you a good candidate for this office.**

Public health has the ability to touch everyone's lives and improve the health of the entire community. From ensuring that our food and water are clean and safe, to providing key preventative services like blood pressure screenings and immunizations, to tracking and controlling disease in the community, public health is multifaceted and important.

I am a public health professional with over a decade of experience working at local and state health departments. I hold a Master of Public Health degree from the Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH), concentrating in Epidemiology. While at BUSPH, I completed a practicum with the Carlisle Board of Health and saw firsthand the wide range of responsibilities that land on a local health director. After graduating, I worked as an epidemiologist for the Boston Public Health Commission's Infectious Disease Bureau, where I tracked and reported weekly on influenza activity in the city and monitored the syndromic surveillance program. Beginning in 2014, I moved to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health Immunization Division, where I continue to work today.

I moved to Norwood with my husband, David, in 2015. We have one daughter, Alexandra, who is a first-grader at the Prescott School. I have been a Town Meeting Member for District 9 since 2019, have been involved with the Impact Norwood community coalition since 2022 and the Impact Norwood steering committee since November 2024. I have been on the School Health Council for Norwood Public Schools since January 2024 and assisted with the creation of the first Annual Wellness Fair last November. I am committed to making Norwood a town that allows all its residents to live happy, healthy lives.

### **0. What are the main functions of this office?**

The Board of Health is a three-person elected board that oversees the Health Department, who are town employees. The Health Department supports a number of key public health functions in town, loosely grouped into health services and inspectional services.

Health services include disease investigations by the public health nurse, blood pressure clinics, immunizations, and supporting substance use prevention and mental health awareness and support services.

Inspectional services include the routine inspection of restaurants, public and semi-public swimming pools, housing inspections on request, recreational camps, hotels, and tanning

facilities. There is also a separate tobacco control program that periodically checks on establishments in town selling tobacco products to ensure they are meeting all local and state regulations.

In addition to general oversight of the work of the Health Department, the Board of Health is also responsible for local regulations regarding public health matters. Most recently, they adopted a regulation regarding the licensing of body work establishments (that provide services like reiki, reflexology, acupuncture, Thai massage, shiatsu, and other similar services). Local regulations in place in Norwood also cover body art practices, the keeping of animals, choke safe certifications for food establishments, tobacco sales, and garbage disposals.

**0. What community resources or supports for residents do you feel Norwood lacks and how would you work to make them available?**

The Norwood Health Department provides many services to residents, but many residents are unaware of what is available. For example, the Health Department provides sharps containers for \$1 or \$3 depending on the size, and will take the containers back when full. Bike helmets for kids are available for \$5. The Department partners with the schools and a local dentist to provide free dental screenings for students, with the option of a low-cost referral if additional dental work is needed. Blood pressure clinics are available on a biweekly basis.

There are a few resources available pre-COVID that have not yet returned. Similar to the dental screenings in schools, the Health Department used to partner with a local optometrist to provide eye exams for students (which supplemented the screenings done by the school nurse), and provided another low-cost referral option for students who needed additional exams or corrective lenses. The sanitarian used to provide a free Food Safety Workshop twice a year for the community's food-handling staff, covering topics related to the Massachusetts Food Code and other appropriate food-handling procedures. I would love to see both of these programs return and would work with the Health Department to make that a priority.

Additionally, Massachusetts has received money from the opioid settlement which has been distributed to every town, and will continue to be distributed for many years to come. To date, Norwood has not used most of this money, except to provide Narcan training for two staff members. In neighboring Canton, they have been able to make Narcan available in public spaces including their library and recreation spaces, and have training available on request for town residents. I want Norwood to be able to use this money for its intended function and to be able to provide services that benefit the community and prevent future opioid overdoses.

Norwood is a member of the Norfolk County 8, a Shared Service Arrangement that receives funding from the state Office of Local and Regional Health through the Public Health Excellence grant. Other towns in NC-8 include Canton, Dedham, Milton, Walpole, Wellesley, and Westwood. (Needham is still technically in the NC-8 but is working with a different coalition for many items.) One of the major strengths of the NC-8 is being able to provide shared services needed by all communities. The NC-8 has recently hired a regional public health nurse and is in the process of hiring a regional epidemiologist. During this period of budgetary uncertainty, being able to fund positions and programs through a regional service provides a great alternative to additional town-funded positions. I would encourage the Norwood Health Department, as the fiscal agent of the Public Health Excellence grant, to explore new ways to utilize the NC-8 to help support the public

health needs of Norwood and the other partner communities.

**0. What are the most pertinent health issues facing residents of Norwood and what would you do to address them?**

I believe that the top issue facing Norwood residents coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic is mental health awareness and support. Demand for mental health services is high, and many have to wait long periods in order to get the care they need. The town received a grant for Mental Health Awareness Training and has successfully trained many town employees to be able to provide Mental Health First Aid. However, these trainings need to be made more broadly available to residents and others that are not town employees, as everyone in town could benefit from the information.

Along the same lines, there needs to be a plan for continued support and funding for Impact Norwood. This is a grant-funded program aimed at reducing substance use among middle and high school students, and has recently expanded to include mental health support due to the correlation between poor mental health and substance misuse. Since 2018, lifetime alcohol use in Norwood High School students has decreased by 20 percentage points, lifetime vaping decreased by 26 percentage points, and lifetime marijuana use decreased by 14 percentage points, a testament to the efforts that Impact Norwood has been working on for years. However in that same time period, high anxiety among high school students decreased by only a few percentage points. While there have been many accomplishments, there is still work to be done. Impact Norwood's grant ends in 2027, and I would like to see continued and permanent funding for this program.

As with many other town departments, I believe that the Health Department would benefit from additional communication with residents, both to better promote messaging and to ensure that residents have access to existing programs. This could include additional formal presences from Board members at School Health Council and Council on Aging meetings and enhanced promotion through NCM and other online platforms.