

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## RUHS Public Health Celebrates 100 Years in Riverside County

**RIVERSIDE, CA (Feb. 27, 2026)** - Riverside University Health System – Public Health kicked off a year-long celebration of its 100 years serving the residents of Riverside County through programs aimed at disease prevention, nutrition and beyond.

The centennial celebration, "[Honoring Our Past and Shaping Our Future.](#)" began Feb. 17-24 with events in Riverside, Perris and Indio. Dignitaries including Riverside County CEO Jeff Van Wagenen and COO Juan Perez joined RUHS - PH leadership to commemorate the founding of the department in 1926.

"It's incredible to look back through our history and see how far we have come. We are indebted to all who have served this county before us and honored to carry that torch forward today," said Kim Saruwatari, Director of RUHS - PH.

One hundred years ago, [polio was a prominent concern for public health officials.](#) Moving into the 1930s and '40s, public health functions expanded beyond communicable disease control for diseases like polio, diphtheria, smallpox, tuberculosis, syphilis and gonorrhea to include public health nursing, sanitation work, nutrition programs, improved data collection and broader health education.

Over the decades, Public Health has:

- added [California Children's Services](#) for critical medical support to children with special health care needs and the [Tobacco Control Project](#) to help shift cultural norms and drive down smoking rates.
- led the [HIV/AIDS](#) response in the 1980s and '90s offering compassion, innovation and advocacy at a time when stigma was high and understanding was low.
- expanded [Injury Prevention Services](#) programs to include road safety and reduced car accident deaths, as well the violence prevention program.
- achieved national public health department accreditation through the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), marking a major milestone in quality and accountability.
- adopted strategic plans to improve community wellness through [Blue Zones](#) and the Community Health Worker Hub.

- adapted to face new epidemics, such as [Mpox](#) to [bird flu](#) and continue to respond to disparities in [infant and maternal](#) mortality as well as to challenges of substance use and [overdoses](#), and [climate](#)-related heat illness.
- advanced the [public health laboratory](#), building innovative programs around antibiotic resistance, wastewater testing and sequencing to identify and track disease clusters and outbreaks.
- grown [Nutrition Services](#) to continue to provide formula and sustenance through the WIC program, as well as develop [a map of food pantries and food banks](#) throughout the county.

"Change is constant and here in Public Health we understand that the future will require that we identify, adapt and meet emerging health challenges as they come. For that reason, the lessons of the past make us stronger so that we will be ready," said Riverside County Health Officer Dr. Jennifer Chevinsky.

Part of the celebration was a display of the department's Vital Signs — an introspective study by each of the agency's programs that looks at the health and impacts of the work being done in local communities and identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

RUHS - PH plans to create a timeline and time capsule which will be stored at its headquarters in Riverside and will engage the public with trivia and historical milestones via its social media outlets.

A webpage was created for the public to learn about the history of Public Health and hear from each of the department branches about the work being done in Riverside County and the many resources available to residents. Each month will highlight a different branch and topic area.

To follow RUHS - PH Centennial celebrations, visit [www.ruhealth.org/public-health/centennial](http://www.ruhealth.org/public-health/centennial).

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#### **About Riverside University Health System – Public Health**

*Riverside University Health System – Public Health (RUHS - PH) serves as Riverside County's public health department. RUHS-PH offers a range of services and programs to promote and protect the health of all county residents and visitors in service of the well-being of the community. RUHS includes the 439-bed Medical Center in Moreno Valley, Calif., 14 Community Health Centers across Riverside County, and Behavioral Health, which provides emergency and inpatient psychiatric care. Visit [www.ruhealth.org](http://www.ruhealth.org) to learn more.*