

# Connecticut Department of Public Health Genomics Office

*Promoting the responsible and effective translation of current and emerging genome-based information into health benefits for the population of Connecticut.*

The Connecticut Department of Public Health Genomics Office (DPH-GO) was officially established in December 2008 after several years of genomics achievements by DPH staff who believed in the growing importance of genomics to the population's health.

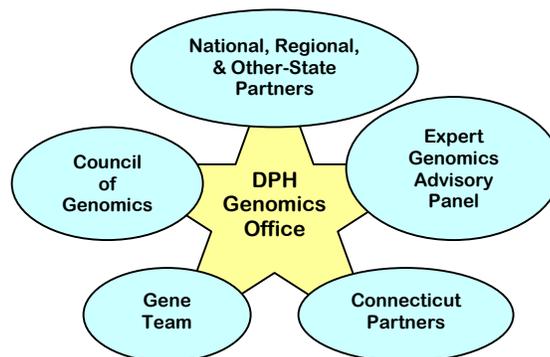
Genomics activities at DPH began in 2002 when DPH recognized the increasing role that genomic discoveries would play in disease detection, prevention, and treatment. DPH embarked on a multi-year planning process funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration to assess statewide genetic service needs and to develop the *Connecticut Genomics Action Plan* (Plan) to address those needs. The Plan was completed in 2005 with one of its goals being to create a Genomics Office that could implement the Plan. Initially an interim "Virtual Office of Genomics" (VOG) was created to facilitate the integration of emerging genomic information into public health policy and practice in Connecticut. VOG consisted of representatives from several major program areas in DPH who were willing to meet on a monthly basis and to devote a portion of their time to promote genomics in DPH. In addition to the VOG, a distinct Gene Team was created, consisting of a broader base of DPH staff who would act as genomics liaisons with their respective DPH programs and meet on an ad hoc basis. An external Expert Genomics Advisory Panel (EGAP) was also established to independently advise DPH on public health genomics activities. Staff from the DPH Planning Branch coordinated the activities of VOG, the Gene Team, and EGAP.

VOG also started to develop partnerships with other Connecticut state agencies, academic institutions, and organizations; with regional groups, such as the New England Regional Genetics Group; with other states, such as New York; and with national organizations, such as CDC's National Office of Public Health Genomics, the Genetic Alliance, and the National Organization for Rare Disorders.

The *Connecticut Genomics Action Plan* was updated in 2007 to call attention to many DPH genomics accomplishments and to identify new and ongoing needs, one of which again was to establish a permanent Genomics Office within DPH. In the fall of 2008, the Commissioner of DPH agreed to establish a formal Genomics Office within the Planning Branch under the direction of the Planning Branch Chief.

It was important to maintain the effective and collaborative nature of VOG, so a transition was made to a new Council of Genomics with broader DPH representation. The Expert Genomics Advisory Panel and the internal Gene Team remain the same. Figure 1 provides a schematic for the new DPH-GO structure.

**Figure 1. DPH-Genomics Office Structure**



## **DPH-Genomics Office (DPH-GO)**

DPH-GO is located in the DPH Planning Branch and is staffed by Beverly Burke, Genomics Coordinator, and Joan Foland, Genomics Epidemiologist. Ms. Burke and Ms. Foland had been key contributors to the *Connecticut Genomics Action Plan* and to the operation of VOG.

DPH-GO has adopted as its mission: *To promote the responsible and effective translation of current and emerging genome-based information into health benefits for the population of Connecticut.*

Its underlying goals are to:

- Facilitate the integration of genomics into DPH programs.
- Foster collaboration within DPH and with local, regional, and national partners to further integrate genomics into public health programs.
- Contribute effectively to genomic policy development.
- Ensure that advances in genomics are implemented in a responsible way, with due consideration of their ethical, legal and social implications.
- Engage and educate public health professionals, health care providers, policymakers, and the public about the role of genomics in health.
- Assure availability of a competent workforce to deliver genetic services.
- Assure access to, and appropriate use of, quality genetic services.

Activities involve education and outreach, macro-level research, surveillance, and policy development on topics such as newborn screening expansion, family health history, and direct-to-consumer marketing of genetic testing. DPH-GO coordinates the meetings and activities of the Council of Genomics, the Gene Team, and the Expert Genomics Advisory Panel.

## **Council of Genomics (COG)**

The collaborative, intra-agency model, which was a hallmark of the interim Virtual Office of Genomics, has transitioned to a similar working group, but with even broader DPH representation. Program areas represented include chronic disease, infectious disease, laboratory services, newborn screening, family health, tumor registry, health care systems, health disparities, oral health, research and development, and health surveillance. The 15 COG members meet monthly to discuss, advise on, and participate in DPH-GO activities, and they dedicate a portion of their time to the Department's public health genomics efforts, including participation in EGAP work groups.

## **Gene Team**

The Gene Team is the Department's internal liaison group. The 35 members serve as genomics ambassadors to their respective DPH programs in an effort to integrate genomics into public health programs and activities. This group meets two to three times a year, with more frequent topical communication as necessary.

## **Expert Genomics Advisory Panel (EGAP)**

The Expert Genomics Advisory Panel (EGAP) consists of a small panel of experts from diverse fields such as medical, insurance, academia, law, bioethics, genetic counseling, and consumer advocacy. The charge of EGAP is to provide independent guidance and advice to DPH on clinical, scientific, legal, educational, ethical, and social issues related to public health genomics. Members of the Panel also contribute to work groups, which have been formed around genomics topics involving services, science, education and workforce development, and ethical/legal/social issues. EGAP meets three times a year.

