



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **Former State Health Officer Dr. Ira L. Myers dies in Montgomery**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Former State Health Officer Dr. Ira Lee Myers died July 23 in Montgomery. Dr. Myers served as Alabama's state health officer from 1963 until his retirement in April 1986. At the time of his retirement he was the longest-serving health officer in the nation. Dr. Myers began his service with the Alabama Department of Public Health in 1955.

During his era in public health, countless advances were made in the treatment of disease and he initiated the mass Salk polio vaccine program as a part of his early work. He was instrumental in the initiation of a narcotics enforcement program, newborn screening, computerization, and support of a laboratory system. During his tenure there were declines in infant and maternal mortality, and facility expansions through the Hill-Burton Act.

State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson said, "Dr. Myers was a giant in public health. Many of the programs begun by Dr. Myers remain essential today."

During his long career of public service, Dr. Myers received many honors and awards which include the following: the Delta Omega Award for scholastic excellence, Harvard School of Public Health; William Henry Sanders Award and the Physicians Recognition Award of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama; D.G. Gill Award of the Alabama Public Health Association; Alabama Public Health Association Hall of Fame; Alabama Academy of Honor, Senior Citizens Hall of Fame, Arthur C. McCormack Award of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials; Director of Medical Specialists, American Men and Women of Science, World Environmental Director, Who's Who in America and the World.

Dr. Myers served in leadership positions with many professional organizations and received appointments to many national advisory committees. The Alabama Public Health Association established the Ira L. Myers Scholarship to the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health and created the Ira L. Myers Award for Excellence in his honor.

Born in Madison County in 1924, he spent his early life in small towns and in rural areas of northern Alabama. After earning a B.S. degree from Howard College (now Samford University) he was awarded an M.D. degree from the Medical College of Alabama in

1949 and served as an extern in South Highland Infirmary in Birmingham. He interned at the United State Public Health Service Marine hospital in Seattle, Wash., and was awarded a

Master of Public Health degree (cum laude) from Harvard University School of Public Health in 1953.

From 1950-1955 he was an epidemiologist with the Public Health Service; Senior Surgeon, chief Epidemic Intelligence Officer, Communicable Disease Center; participated in field studies of polio epidemiology and in field trials of the Salk polio vaccine. With other noted national public health physicians, Dr. Myers co-authored several scientific articles in national publications detailing the cause, effects and treatment for polio and other similar viral infections.

Dr. Myers returned to Alabama in 1955 as administrative officer and assistant to then State Health Officer, Dr. D.G. Gill. He helped initiate the mass Salk Polio Vaccine program for the state, initiated the Hospital Service for the Indigent and the Medical Aspects of Assistance for the Aged Programs (Kerr-Mills Law). He served as chairman of the Alabama Water Improvement Commission, 1963-1982, and the initiated the Narcotic Control Program in 1967. Dr. Myers was president of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials in 1972.

On the occasion of his retirement then U.S. Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop and Dr. Albert B. Sabin were honored guests at the retirement celebration held by the Alabama Public Health Association to honor him.

Dr. Myers was highly involved as a Baptist layman and was a deacon, trustee and Sunday School teacher at Dalraida Baptist Church. He also served on the Alabama Baptist State Convention Executive Board, as chairman of the Retirement Center Board, on the Disaster Relief Committee and on the Judson College Board of Advisors. Dr. Myers endowed the Martha and Dorothy Myers Fund for Faculty Development at Judson College in memory of his wife, Dorothy, and his daughter, Dr. Martha Myers, Baptist missionary who was martyred in late 2002 in Yemen.