

2021 FEDERAL ISSUES & PRIORITIES

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN COVID-19 RESPONSE



Local public health has been our first line of defense in responding to COVID-19. We lead case investigations, coordinate testing, implement vaccine administration, and collaborate with community groups in providing comprehensive care. Our expertise and connection to our communities are critical in informing federal and state response planning implementation. Ongoing federal relief maintains a high capacity for local response.

Our state's quick public health response to COVID-19 has only been possible because of prior investments in public health preparedness like the **Public Health Emergency Fund** and the **Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness and Advancing Innovation Act**. To maintain this level of response and the ability to adapt to future health threats, we must rebuild and bolster our public health capabilities at the local, state, and federal levels. These capabilities include expanding data infrastructure, expanding public health laboratory capacity, and building a workforce of trusted, expert public health professionals.

PUBLIC HEALTH FUNDING

Federal public health funding is critical to the work of local health departments. In Washington State, federal funds account for 18% of local health budgets (2019 Local Health Jurisdiction Funding Report. www.doh.wa.gov). This funding provides local public health capacity to promote health equity, community partnerships, and policy, systems, and environmental programs. Federal funding gives health departments stability during emergencies when local and state revenue is more volatile. COVID-19 has reinforced the need for sustained investment into public health—so that we can continue to lead our communities' response now and in the long-term, and through recovery.

In addition to current funding appropriations to public health, WSALPHO supports the following measures:

- **Appropriation language that designates funding for local health departments.** This ensures funding meant for local public health work is disbursed appropriately and efficiently to local agencies.
- **Federal tracking of the disbursement of public health funds.** This will help inform how funding gets to local communities and ensures greater participation between state and local agencies in funding decision-making.
- **Maintain the strength of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** State and local agencies look to the CDC to implement effective programs, provide technical expertise, and support local priorities.



Contact: Jaime Bodden, Managing Director, WSALPHO

jbodden@wsac.org | 360-489-3011

206 10th Ave. SE, Olympia, WA 98501 | www.wsalpho.org

2021 FEDERAL ISSUES & PRIORITIES

BUILDING A STRONG PUBLIC HEALTH WORKFORCE

Complex threats and recession budget cuts make it hard for the public health system to protect and serve Washington's families and communities. Program cuts and service reductions have become the norm for local agencies—creating a diminished workforce right when they're needed to combat the pandemic. It's time to rebuild our system to better protect against threats and improve our communities' health.

Public health in Washington State has lost nearly a quarter of its workforce since 2008—with some local agencies losing 50% or more. Workforce depletion is a consistent trend across the country. Additionally, projections suggest that nearly half of the current workforce might be leaving in the coming years between staff who plan to retire or plan to pursue jobs in the private sector. This does not provide stability or readiness to respond to threats and emergencies.

WSALPHO urges your support for The Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program. Public health professionals who agree to serve two years in a local, state or tribal health department would be eligible for a loan repayment program. This is relevant now more than ever as more staff have entered public health due to the COVID-19 response. A repayment program provides additional incentives to keep them long-term.

Through the pandemic, public health has become more and more polarized and politicized. Health officials at all levels of government have been harassed, threatened, and subjected to political pressures. **Policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels must support local health officials committed to following science dictates and protecting the public.** National public health guidance needs to be clear, consistent, and science-based to support these hardworking public servants at the local level.

ABOUT US

WSALPHO is a non-profit that coordinates and convenes the 35 local health jurisdictions across Washington State. We work closely with the state agencies, our state county affiliate, and the National Association of City and County Health Officials to improve the health of communities by strengthening and advocating for local health departments. Local public health provide a number of services and programs to their communities:



Communicable
Disease Control



Maternal,
Child & Family
Health



Chronic Disease
Prevention



Environmental
Public Health



Policy and
Education



Community
Partnerships

Contact: Jaime Bodden, Managing Director, WSALPHO

jbodden@wsac.org | 360-489-3011

206 10th Ave. SE, Olympia, WA 98501 | www.wsalpho.org