



March 26, 2019

Senate Business and General Government Committee  
Testimony Supporting Public Health Modernization Funding, SB 5525

Co-Chair Beyer Co-Chair Nosse and Members of the Joint Subcommittee on Human Services:

My name is Tom Kuhn and I am the Community Health Manager for Deschutes County Health Services Public Health. I am here testifying on the need for additional Public Health Modernization funding and the impact it already has made in Central Oregon.

The goals of Public Health Modernization include ensuring that you, your family and future generations, can expect the same basic public health protections and preventive services critical to your health and safety, no matter who you are or where you live in Oregon.

In 2018, Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson Counties in Central Oregon received an initial investment in Modernization funding of \$500,000 for two years. Prior to obtaining Modernization funding, Central Oregon's three public health departments had limited capacity and inadequate resources to focus on communicable disease prevention and surveillance efforts or to complete a thorough outbreak response. When outbreaks of diseases occurred, the communicable disease teams were greatly taxed and only able to provide the minimal amount of response efforts.

Thanks to this initial investment, we now have a dedicated Outbreak Prevention, Surveillance, and Response team, which includes a tri-county epidemiologist and a tri-county infection prevention nurse, who have been working to address gaps in service. The team focuses primarily on:

- Conducting active regional communicable disease surveillance and risk communication to health care providers, regional partners and the public;
- Preventing and controlling outbreaks in the region's institutional settings that serve vulnerable populations; and
- Providing surge capacity to respond to outbreaks and emerging health threats, like our recent measles exposure.

This coordinated regional team has improved Central Oregon's capacity to effectively address communicable diseases. Data has shown that 58% of outbreaks in Central Oregon occurred at long term care facilities. In 2018, the team responded to five outbreaks in long term care facilities and provided infection prevention training to 78% of them. These efforts will make these facilities safer for their residents and reduce the costs associated with outbreak response.

In addition to communicable disease response, additional Modernization funding will help address environmental health threats from things like drought, deteriorating air quality, wildfires, heat waves, and contaminated drinking water. For example, the past couple of years have seen some of the worst summertime smoke incidents in memory and we're being told this may well be the new normal. Local Public Health is involved in collaborative work on wildfire mitigation to reduce the risk of wildfires and the number of smoke

incidents that affect our citizens and our economy. This is one area where additional funding could bolster our efforts in helping our community protect itself from harmful annual wildfire smoke.

I urge the committee to support further investments in Public Health funding to provide all Oregonians with the basic public health protections and preventive services they deserve.

I'd be happy to answer any questions.