



Benton County Health Department

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Person-Centered Behavioral & Physical Health Care Public Health & Prevention Regulatory and Population Health Health Management Services

Testimony of Benton County Commissioner Linda Modrell, Chair of the Association of Oregon Counties Human Services Steering Committee

Public Health Authority

As many of you are aware counties serve as the Local Public Health Authority. According to ORS 431.375 (2):

County governments of health districts established under ORS 431.414 are the local public health authority responsible for management of local public health services unless the county contracts with private persons or an agency to act as the local public health authority or the county relinquishes authority to the state.

The Oregon Revised Statutes further outline what the Local public health authority shall ensure. According to ORS 431.416:

- *Assure activities necessary for the preservation of health or prevention of disease in the area under its jurisdiction as provided in the annual plan of the authority or district are performed. These activities shall include but not be limited to:*
 - *Epidemiology and control of preventable diseases and disorders;*
 - *Parent and child health services, including family planning clinics as described in ORS 435.205;*
 - *Collection and reporting of health statistics;*
 - *Health information and referral services; and*
 - *Environmental health services.*

Public Health Funding

Counties contributed approximately \$100M in county general fund last biennium and counties continue to look for innovative approaches to funding public health. While public health is largely funded by Federal Funds and County General Fund, every state dollar coming to local public health is incredibly important.

- **BabiesFirst!**: Approximately \$1M in state “seed” money is used to encourage local county match and result in funding a \$12M program that impacts thousands of children throughout the state.
- **Benton County example**: Health policy and promotion work engaging the community in developing healthy choices at an individual and neighborhood level. (Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities work)
 - Built environment – safe routes to schools, access to recreational opportunities
 - Access to healthy food – addressing food deserts, linkages with local farmers and rural stores

Counties, Public Health and CCOs

By statute, all CCOs have community advisory councils (CACs). Public health has played an active role in the development of the CACs. There are public health people helping choose CACs and serving as members and the chairs of some CACs.

- In Benton County we have a well-established engagement with diverse communities and strategies to insure everyone is at the table.
- Health assessments & preventive services with highest-risk uninsured, minority & disenfranchised populations.

Counties have been working closely with CCOs to ensure that public health is an important aspect of the organization. Local Public Health emphasizes that we move the focus “upstream” and work on preventative measures to avoid costly medical expenses. Data from focused risk-group assessments referenced above have significantly informed public health’s Community Health Assessment & Improvement Plan (which the CCO participated in creating and is using). That data provides a realistic picture of the actual health status, concerns and priorities of the CCO population to help guide and direct the CCO efforts. In addition, Health Impact Assessments performed by public health provide an informational tool to help decision-makers consider the health implications of policies and decisions that may not have otherwise been considered.

Counties support the governor’s proposed Health System Transformation fund: \$15M for partnerships between CCOs and public health providers. Overall improvement of population health through policy work and community engagement creates opportunities for more people to make healthy choices. This is the keystone for bending the health cost curve. It is essential that adequate funds be made available to public health in order to maintain the population focused policy/health promotion work. The current main source of funding for this work is time limited grants that limit continuity and effectiveness.

Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement are another valuable source of funding for local public health work. In the past no TMSA dollars have ever gone towards prevention programs. We believe that the dollars can be used by CCOs but with sideboards to ensure that the money is spent on prevention work. In the past, a decrease in investment in tobacco prevention work has resulted in higher rates of smoking.

- Since 1993 per-capita cigarette pack sales have dropped from 93.1 to 47.9, a 49% reduction.
- Still, Oregon pays an estimated \$287 M per year in Medicaid costs related to smoking.

Benton County Public Health

Improving health necessitates investing in and focusing on health at a population level. The Health Department is working to improve the health of all. In Benton County our Health Department has engaged City and County planning and development, public works, and parks and recreation to sharpen the focus on design for health. We are involved in health impact assessments related to traffic flows and neighborhood design. Local investments in public health, success in seeking grant funds, and a strong program focus on creating healthy choices has made Benton County the healthiest county in Oregon. For health reform to be successful in Oregon we must continue to increase the focus on creating healthy communities. A State investment in Public Health Departments is the way to get this done.

“Healthy People in a Healthy Community”