



## HEALTH SERVICES

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The Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services  
Testimony for SB 5526  
April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015

Chair Bates, Chair Nathanson, and members of the Committee:

Good morning, my name is Tom Kuhn and I am the Community Health Program Manager for Deschutes County Health Services in Central Oregon. I am here today supporting investments in public health to ensure our local health departments have the capacity to address the rising number of reportable diseases, and that we continue to prevent the leading causes of death and disease in Oregon.

Communicable disease investigation and response is a foundational public health capability that serves to protect the safety and health of our communities. Not only do these programs protect Oregonians from foodborne illness outbreaks, sexually transmitted infections, and vaccine preventable diseases, they are also trained and prepared to respond to animal bites, drug resistant tuberculosis, and the most unique health topics you can imagine. Recent examples of communicable disease work conducted in Deschutes County include:

- In 2014, responding to over 1,000 reportable diseases, utilizing a staff of under 2.0 FTE. Of this number, we responded to 60 cases of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, compared to having 26 cases total the previous eight years.
- Recent Ebola response efforts include having staff available 24 hours to monitor persons returning from Ebola affected areas of Africa and working with our local hospital and clinical partners to create an Ebola Response Plan.

I would like to underscore the magnitude of cost and time associated with investigating reportable diseases, particularly the cost, often hundreds of thousands of dollars, of a single outbreak of a reemerging disease like measles (MMWR, Nov. 2008).

While we rely on the "State Support for Public Health" funding to perform communicable disease work, we are fortunate that we do receive county general fund support as well. Without it, we would be unable to perform at our current level. In addition, Deschutes is one of the fastest growing counties in the state and nationally, and with growing populations comes growth in communicable diseases. Additional support would allow more time to focus on prevention efforts and more thoroughly

investigate and limit the spread of sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis, which now are on the rise. The benefits of communicable disease work are often not readily apparent or visible, yet they are vital to the health of our communities.

In addition to our communicable disease work and numerous prevention-based programs, Deschutes County Health Services also works with our community to reduce the burden of chronic disease. Obesity and Type 2 diabetes are growing at an alarming rate. The percentage of Oregon adults with diagnosed diabetes has doubled in the last 20 years. The prevalence of diabetes is higher among racial and ethnic minorities and low-income populations. Funding provided by the Oregon Public Health Division "Healthy Communities" program supports the Living Well with Chronic Conditions program, which includes a diabetes-specific component. This evidence-based, six-week long program helps individuals with chronic illnesses better manage their conditions. Research has demonstrated that people who complete the workshop have improved health outcomes and reduced utilization of the health system, ultimately saving our taxpayers money.

Investing public health funding to address chronic disease, current communicable disease needs, and the ability to respond to emerging diseases will ensure that local health departments are able to properly protect the health and safety of our populations.

I would like to thank you for allowing me to share the important public health work we do in Deschutes County and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Tom Kuhn  
Community Health Program Manager  
Deschutes County Health Services

#### References

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*MMWR, Local Health Department Costs Associated with Response to a School-Based Pertussis Outbreak --- Omaha, Nebraska, September--November 2008 Weekly January 14, 2011 / 60(01);5-9*