

March 26, 2019

Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Human Services  
**HB 5525 – Public Health Modernization**

Via e-mail: [jwmhs.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:jwmhs.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)

Co-Chais Nosse and Beyer, members of the subcommittee,

My name is Alejandro Queral and I am writing as the Public's Representative in the Governor-appointed Public Health Advisory Board. The purpose of my letter is to urge to continue to support efforts to modernize Oregon's governmental public health system.

A modern public health system ensures critical public health protections are in place for every person in Oregon, that the public health system is prepared and has the right resources to address emerging health threats, and that the public health system is engaged daily to eliminate health disparities.

Oregon's efforts to modernize governmental public health began in 2013 with the Task Force for the Future of Public Health Services. The Task Force was created by the 2013 Legislative Assembly to provide recommendations for the future of public health in Oregon. In September 2014 the Task Force submitted a set of recommendations to the legislature. These recommendations became law in 2015.

I was a member of the Task Force and have continued to oversee how public health modernization is implemented as a member of Oregon's Public Health Advisory Board. From this perspective, it is clear that a 21<sup>st</sup> century public health system is a requirement for the long-term success of health care reform and to ensure the well-being of all Oregonians.

As you know, Oregon's public health system serves all 4 million people in the state and new threats to health are beginning to emerge. Changes in Oregon's climate make the state more susceptible to certain communicable diseases and environmental health threats. Oregon families and communities face a growing array of public health threats including toxic algae blooms that contaminate our drinking water, and weeks of wildfire smoke that make the air dangerous to breathe.

Today's health challenges like opioid addiction and suicide are increasingly complex and cannot be solved using the same public health tools we have used in the past. And we know that while health is improving for some, not everyone is benefitting equally. Some groups continue to experience higher burdens of illness and disease, and communities with the fewest resources will be hardest hit by environmental health threats.

In this changing landscape, the focus should be on preventing disease from occurring. This is what the public health system does, which keeps people and communities healthy and saves money by lowering the demand for costly health care interventions. Recent studies show that investing in public health saves lives and saves health care costs. For example,

- A 2016 study from California estimated a return on investment for public health spending of \$67 to \$88 for every dollar spent.<sup>1</sup>
- A 2011 national study showed reduction in infant and mortality and reductions in deaths from diseases with a 10% increase in county public health spending.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, the Oregon Health Authority received a \$5 million legislative investment to begin modernizing Oregon's governmental public health system. The majority of these dollars were distributed to local public health authorities and partners to develop new regional approaches for controlling communicable diseases and eliminating health disparities. The Public Health Advisory Board receives regular updates from these LPHA partnerships and they have shown that, in a short amount of time, these partnerships are showing changes that will meaningfully improve the health of community members. For example:

- The legislative investment has resulted in new and stronger partnerships between local and tribal health authorities. Local and tribal partners are working together on how best to serve their shared community.
- Local public health authorities are working with Regional Health Equity Coalitions and other culturally specific organizations to develop solutions that meet the needs of the community members who experience health disparities.

Continued investments in public health modernization will ensure Oregon continues to make progress toward eliminating health disparities and building strong and resilient communities. I strongly urge you to support our efforts to build a public health system for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Sincerely,

Alejandro Qeral

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<sup>1</sup> Brown T.T. Returns on investment in California county health departments of public health. Am J Public Health 2016; 106(8):1477-82.

<sup>2</sup> Mays, G.P. and Smith, S. A. Evidence links increases in public health spending to declines in preventable deaths. Health Aff 2011; 30(8): 1585-1593.