



February 9, 2021
Joint Subcommittee on Human Services
Testimony Supporting Public Health Modernization Funding, HB 5024

Co-Chairs Senator Lieber and Representative Nosse and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tom Kuhn and I am the Community Health Manager for Deschutes County Health Services Public Health. I am here today supporting additional investments in public health to ensure our local public health authorities have the capacity to address communicable disease and environmental health threats, and that we continue to prevent the leading causes of death and disease in Oregon. I am here today to support a \$69 million investment in Public Health Modernization in the OHA Budget, HB 5024.

In 2018, Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson Counties in Central Oregon received an initial investment in Modernization funding. 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. While the COVID 19 Pandemic did change the way we work in Public Health, the foundation created by Modernization funding helped us to provide timely and accurate data analysis, reporting, and communication about the COVID-19 situation in Central Oregon, as well as greatly improved outreach and investigation in our long-term care facilities and other congregate settings. In fact, the improved relationships and interactions we established in our long-term care facilities enabled public health to more quickly intervene and provide preventive education when COVID outbreaks occurred and when risk was most great.

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. In 2020, Oregon experienced the worst smoke incidents in recorded history, as well the most devastating wildfires. 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.

Please support an additional \$69 million in funding for public health to work to eliminate health disparities and continue implementing the Public Health Modernization model that the legislature adopted in 2015. We must 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.