



April 27, 2023

**Re: Increasing Support for the Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory in Post-Pandemic Oregon**

The COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on the threat posed to public health and the economy from zoonotic diseases - infectious diseases transmissible from animals to humans.

The pandemic also highlighted the positive impact the Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (OVDL) has on protecting animal and human health.

During the pandemic, when the state lab run by OHA was overwhelmed, the OVDL stepped up, pivoting to apply their expertise to address the emergency, rapidly developing the capability to contribute to testing for COVID-19. In total, scientists at the laboratory performed more than 300,000 COVID -19 tests for the state of Oregon.

The OVDL is Oregon's one Health laboratory responsible for diagnosing animal diseases across the state, from pets to agricultural animals to wildlife. They do this by working hand-in-hand with local public health, the Oregon Health Authority, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

OVDL has been on the frontline of testing for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). They've diagnosed HPAI in thousands of domestic and wild birds and, worryingly, increasing numbers of different species of mammals.

Most recently the OVDL has been enlisted to provide testing to investigate the spread of diseases from rats to humans, particularly in Oregon's urban unhoused population. There's a worry that the serious problem in our state with the houseless is also an unacknowledged public health emergency, in addition to a housing, behavioral health, and economic emergency.

OVDL needs \$3.73 million in facility upgrades and increased staffing, as outlined in HB 3247, to continue to meet the needs of Oregon while providing appropriate levels of employee health and safety.

We may not see another global pandemic in our lifetimes, but we know that more emergencies are coming. We live in a highly mobile world, in which viruses travel on planes. We need to fund public health like we fund the fire department – and that includes the OVDL – so that it is equipped and ready to go for the next emergency.

Sincerely,

Sarah Lochner  
Executive Director  
Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials  
[sarah@oregonclho.org](mailto:sarah@oregonclho.org)