



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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September 13, 2023

David Schumacher, Director
Office of Financial Management
Post Office Box 43113
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RE: Department of Health 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget Submittal

Dear Director Schumacher:

I respectfully submit the Department of Health's 2024 supplemental operating budget requests for Governor Inslee's consideration and want to thank you for your ongoing support of our public health mission.

Last year, the Department of Health (DOH) released our [*Transformational Plan: A Vision for Health in Washington State*](#). This plan is guided by cornerstone values of equity, innovation, and engagement (EIE) and provides a "north star" roadmap for improving health across Washington. Key priorities for transformational health include:

- **Health and Wellness** – all Washingtonians have the opportunity to attain their full potential physical, mental, and social health and well-being;
- **Health Systems and Workforce Transformation** – all Washingtonians are well served by a health ecosystem that is robust and responsive, while promoting transparency, equity, and trust;
- **Environmental Health** – all Washingtonians will thrive in a broad range of healthy environments – natural, built, and social;
- **Emergency Response and Resilience** – all Washington communities have the information and resources they need to build resilience in the face of myriad public health threats and are well-positioned to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and natural disasters; and
- **Global and One Health** – all Washingtonians live in ever-connected environments that recognize and leverage the intersection of both global and domestic health as well as the connections of humans, animals, and the environment.

As we work towards implementing strategies to achieve this vision, DOH is leaning into Governor Inslee's theme for his *2023 State of the State Address*: Bold actions for building a stronger Washington. To be bold in the public health field, we must have a strong and robust workforce, see sustained investments in systems and tools, and promote health and well-being to create the opportunities for Washingtonians to live their healthiest lives.

Consistent with OFM’s direction, DOH has taken careful consideration to focus this year’s supplemental budget request on addressing critical gaps in activities as we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as funding the needs that remain after the close of the 2023 session. I want to be clear there are several important needs and challenges that we simply do not have the resources to take on but given the fiscal realities of the budget cycle and other statewide competing interests, we have done our best to prioritize our requests in the context of a shortened and more focused legislative session.

As we all know, we are at a critical juncture in public health as the response to COVID-19 evolves into that of an endemic one. Similar to many agencies across the nation, DOH is now able to revisit efforts that could not be prioritized during the pandemic response, as well as address urgent matters that were exacerbated by the pandemic. The main themes of our focus include: 1) raising the visibility of both health and prevention as well as the public health field as a whole; 2) actualizing investment and support for the public health – and healthcare – workforce; and 3) modernizing systems so the people in our field have the data, tools, and technologies to do their work effectively and efficiently. Addressing these themes will require both one-time as well as sustained investment in public health activities.

I cannot emphasize enough the expenditures necessary for the health workforce – in both public health and healthcare alike – so that the people in that workforce are supported, are appropriately trained, and have the tools needed to do their work today and into the future. This means that we must invest in ways that we have not before, including to bolster the previous direction given by the Legislature to create a DOH regional public health infrastructure.

Given our ongoing concern about the health workforce, it is no surprise that we continue in our quest to design and implement effective and efficient credentialing and licensure systems within our agency. These systems have been in place for many years and are the pipeline and entry for new and appropriately trained health workers in Washington state. As an example, a strong and robust behavioral health workforce is more important than ever in our state. Ongoing investments in our Health Systems and Quality Assurance (HSQA) area including technology-based systems will afford us the opportunity to improve on our current systems in place.

We believe necessary investments will allow us to make the credentialing processes for a number of health workforce areas more streamlined and in turn decrease the amount of time it takes to go through the licensure and credentialing process for practitioners in our state. Along these same lines, DOH is requesting funding to invest in activities that will help bolster the state rural health workforce, which suffered drastic losses through the COVID-19 pandemic, causing ripple effects for healthcare delivery in many parts of our state.

Staying with the theme of behavioral health, DOH seeks funding to address increases in anticipated volume to the nationally recognized “988” lifeline crisis center (including the nation’s first Native Strong initiative), and to enhance the call center platform to provide interoperability capabilities alongside Health Care Authority’s systems. While we continue to work with our partners to support efforts in suicide and crisis prevention, we see the need for population level behavioral health approaches that further emphasize upstream prevention in addressing key concerns such as opioids and fentanyl as well as suicide prevention.

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We see a holistic health and wellness education and media campaign with emphasis on emotional and social support and prevention strategies as necessary and timely to complement the ongoing work of the myriad of agencies involved in behavioral health service provision throughout our state.

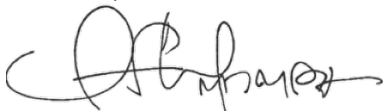
We continue to leverage the critical lessons learned from the pandemic in a number of public health areas and evaluate where further improvements are achievable. As we look to the future, DOH aims to sustain its well-regarded mobile health program to ensure that preventive health services can reach those Washingtonians with significant needs and limited access to care, especially those in geographically isolated areas. As access for vaccinations changes, DOH knows that the establishment of an Adult Vaccination Program for the hundreds of thousands of uninsured adults across Washington can help provide equitable access to vaccines. Additionally, you will note our emphasis on environmental health as outlined in our *Transformational Plan*. These are just some of the important themes that are embedded in our budget request for next year.

In closing, the EIE cornerstone values drive our agency work, fostering collaborations with a host of partners at the global, national, state, and community levels. Through effective partnerships with “public-private-academic-community” entities, we see work alongside state agencies, other public health agencies, the private sector, academia, health care entities, Tribal Nations, and community-rooted organizations, as critical to address the challenges identified.

We are continually enacting efficiencies with existing resources and seeking new partnerships and non-governmental funding opportunities. Despite these efforts, there continue to be critical gaps in resources available to meet priority public health needs in our state. While DOH understands the limitations of state resources, state dollars remain critical to our agency’s efforts.

My leadership team and I look forward to discussing these issues further with you. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best,



Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH
Secretary of Health

Enclosures

cc: Breann Boggs, Office of Financial Management
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