

Public Health Roundtable

April 3, 2019

Dear Members of the Legislature,

As organizations representing our state's health care systems, consumers, and providers, we are writing to ask you to provide a significant investment in public health in the 2019-21 budget.

Tracking, responding to and preventing disease outbreaks is essential to protecting the public's health. But years of recession-era budget cuts and our region's growing population have left our public health system unable to ensure a swift response to outbreaks. And, perhaps even more concerning, the public health system is unable to work to prevent many disease outbreaks—or food and water threats—from happening in the first place.

That is one reason multiple disease outbreaks have affected communities across our state this year. The measles outbreak in Clark County alone has cost the state more than \$1 million and forced many kids to stay home from school. Cases of syphilis and gonorrhea have increased more than 300% statewide. And rates of tuberculosis in King County remain higher than both state and national averages.

When we fail to adequately fund public health, we put our communities, our families, and our kids at risk.

The \$22 million ongoing investment in the House's proposed 2019-2021 operating budget will help to close gaps in the public health system to keep our communities safe from the spread of disease. Thank you. This is an important down payment on the cost to fully fund core public health services which is nearly \$450 million.

We know what can happen when public health doesn't have the adequate resources to prevent, monitor, and respond to disease outbreaks. We are also committed to improving health outcomes by promoting healthy behavior such as preventing youth tobacco and vape use and doing the necessary outreach and engagement with schools and priority populations around new public policies like HB 1074, which raises the age to purchase tobacco to 21.

Washington state must right-size its public health system, and we need to start now.

Sincerely,

American Cancer Society – Cancer Action Network

Washington State Public Health Association

American Heart Association

Washington State Medical Association

Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition

Washington Bikes

Children's Alliance

Washington State Labor Council

Foundation for Healthy Generations

Washington State Nurses Association

Hepatitis Education Project

Within Reach

PTE Local 17

WA Association of Local Public Health Officials