



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

## Department of Health

FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT SERVICES  
Juneau Office

P.O. Box 110650  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0650  
Main: 907.465.3082  
Fax: 907.465.2499

February 20, 2025

The Honorable Andy Josephson  
Chair, House HSS Finance Subcommittee  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 505  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Josephson:

The Department of Health received the following questions during the Division of Public Health budget presentation to the House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee on February 11, 2025:

### **What are COVID funds being used for?**

The remaining funds are one-time expenditures to support data and laboratory modernization efforts to improve the public health laboratories and various outdated systems. Examples include the following:

- Data modernization initiative assessment
- Laboratory humidification
- Nursing electronic health record system
- Laboratory information system (LIMS) upgrades
- Respiratory illness/COVID testing supplies and equipment for Public Health Laboratories
- Data, and analytics infrastructure
- Contract with Alaska Hospital and Healthcare Association (AHHA) to train and incentivize healthcare workforce including Community Health Workers (CHW), Certified Nurse Aides (CNA), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), and Registered Nurses (RN)

### **What is the curriculum of afterschool programs funded with MET funds?**

The Department of Health requires grantees to use an outcome-based comprehensive health education curriculum to address marijuana and substance use prevention. Grantees may select their own curriculum to meet grant requirements.

The Alaska Afterschool Network is the afterschool program technical assistance provider. They offer grantees access to an optional marijuana awareness and education

curriculum called Healthy Lifestyles. Healthy Lifestyles is highly interactive, with an emphasis on youth voice and group discussion.

**Are schools asking for less in marijuana funds? Can you provide a total on requested grant funds for marijuana education and treatment funds (MET) versus actual available funds for MET?**

Grantees of these funds are a mix of schools and community-based organizations. In addition to school districts, eligible applicants for afterschool program grants include state agencies, cities, boroughs, Regional Educational Attendance Areas, nonprofit organizations, and Alaska Native entities.

The most recent Positive Youth Development Afterschool Program Request for Proposals (RFP) closed in FY2023. The current grant period is FY2024-FY2027.

- 19 organizations applied for funding
- The Department of Health awarded nine grants
- Organizations applied for a total of \$3.8 million in afterschool grants
- The Department of Health awarded \$1.9 million in afterschool grants

**Are other factors other than drug overdoses leading to additional State Medical Examiner examinations? Is there an increase in deaths from other factors?**

The biggest impact to increased workload at the State Medical Examiner's Office has been due primarily to overdose related deaths.

**Where did the nursing positions go?**

The Division of Public Health transferred seven positions that, despite recruiting efforts, had been vacant for at least twelve months from the Nursing allocation to other allocations within the Division of Public Health to support other priorities.

- Public Health Nurse 3 (061520) was transferred to Epidemiology and reclassified to a Health Program Manager 1 for the immunization program
- Public Health Nurse 1 (061136) was transferred to Public Health Laboratories and reclassified to a Public Health Microbiologist 2 to be a biosafety officer
- Public Health Nurse 2 (061490) was transferred to Public Health Laboratories and reclassified to a Health Program Manager 4 to be a deputy laboratory chief
- Public Health Nurse 4 (061629) was transferred to the State Medical Examiner and reclassified to a Medicolegal Investigator 2 to be a death investigator
- Public Health Nurse Aide (061231) was transferred to the State Medical Examiner and reclassified to a Medicolegal Investigator 2 to be a death investigator

- Public Health Nurse 3 (061323) was transferred to Women, Children, and Family Health and reclassified to a Mental Health Clinician 3 to support the maternal child death review
- Public Health Nurse 3 (061094) was transferred to Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and reclassified to a Health Program Associate for the injury surveillance program

**Do you have resources to inform Alaskans about the dangers of social media? What are the linkages between social media and overdoses and suicides?**

The department does not currently have a program specifically focused on the connection between social media and suicide. That said, it is actively engaged in suicide prevention through a range of evidence-based initiatives.

The department recognizes that social media can play a complex role in mental health, both as a risk factor potentially and as a tool for connection and support. The department's suicide prevention efforts include expanding access to mental health resources, training providers and community leaders in suicide risk recognition, and supporting crisis intervention services.

Additionally, the department monitors emerging research and best practices related to mental health. As this area evolves, the department remains open to exploring opportunities to collaborate with partners to better understand and address the role of social media in suicide prevention.

**When will opioid funds be distributed this year?**

There are currently 19 settlement grantees. The current grant program is a three-year award. Grantees are completing their continuation application for year two in March and the second year of funding will be awarded July 1, 2025.

If you have additional questions, please contact me at (907) 465-1630.

Sincerely,



Pam Halloran  
Assistant Commissioner

cc: Valerie Rose, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Finance  
Jordan Shilling, Director, Governor's Legislative Office  
Tim Hess, Office of Management and Budget  
Heidi Hedberg, Commissioner

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Robert Lawrence, Chief Medical Officer

Emily Ricci, Deputy Commissioner

Lindsey Kato, Director of Division of Public Health

Raquel Solomon-Gross, Deputy Director of Finance and Management Services

Dustin Scown, Budget Manager

Courtney Enright, Legislative Liaison

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