



ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed to Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

March 14, 2019

The Honorable Jennifer Johnston
Chair, Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Johnston and Members of the Committee:

The Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) is extremely concerned about the Governor's proposed two-million-dollar cut to the Section of Public Health Nursing's budget. Since 2015, Alaska's Public Health Nursing has sustained significant budget cuts resulting in:

- 21% reduction in staff (41 staff positions).
- The closure of 6 Public Health Centers (from 22 to 16 statewide). Cordova, Ft. Yukon, Galena, Haines, Seward and Wrangell are now only served by itinerant Public Health Nurses on an infrequent basis.
- A 13% decrease (5,376 FY15) and (4,689.5 FY19) in contracted public health nursing services for Anchorage, Kotzebue and the North Slope Borough.
- The elimination of reproductive health, STI screening and immunizations to 30 years of age or older.
- The elimination of Well-Child services for anyone over the age of 6.

Those reductions in services have already had a significant impact on the health of Alaskans.

- The number of immunizations decreased from 33,340 in FY16 to 16,000 in FY18, a 52% reduction. This led to a more than three-fold increase in influenza confirmed cases, from 1,955 between October 2015 and September 2016 to 6,515 between October 2017 and September 2018.¹
- The number of screening and treatment visits for sexually transmitted infection decreased by 30% at the same time that Alaska is seeing rising epidemics both gonorrhea and syphilis.

¹ <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/influenza/influenza.aspx>

- There were 1,115 reported cases of gonorrhea in 2015, increasing to 1,454 in 2016 (31% increase), and an additional 1,035 cases in the first six months of 2017.²
- The Alaska Section of Epidemiology issued an update on October 23, 2018 on Alaska's continuing syphilis outbreak, which has now reached the highest level in four decades.³

Across the board there are fewer Public Health Nurses to outreach Alaska's highest risk population. Early intervention saves money and suffering. A healthy population costs less than a sick population. Decreased outreach to the most vulnerable will increase emergency room and health care costs across the state. There is simply no question that reductions to Alaska's public health nursing services are diminishing the health and wellbeing of Alaskans. Alaska's public health nurses and centers play a vital and unique role in preventing disease and promoting health, working with individuals in high-risk groups and those unable to access the primary care system. Keeping them healthy keeps everyone healthy.

The state can't afford for the continued reductions to vital health promotion, prevention and disease control labor force. The ALPHA respectfully requests the House Health and Social Services Finance Subcommittee to maintain Public Health Nursing's budget at the FY19 level.

Sincerely,

Patty Owen, Co-Chair
Policy Committee



Jayne E. Andreen, Co-Chair
Policy Committee

² http://dhss.alaska.gov/News/Documents/press/2017/Gonorrhea_pr_10032017.pdf

³ http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/Documents/phan/AKPHAN_20181023_Syphilis.pdf