

State Legislative Sessions Update

Alaska

An initiative for basic public health protection services received \$755,000 (one-third of the governor's requested amount) to address tuberculosis, measles, hepatitis C, chlamydia, and other bacterial and viral diseases, as well as to keep Alaskan children fully immunized.

Also funded: a \$1.2 million increase for salary increases for public health nurses; \$500,000 to replace aging and outdated emergency medical services equipment; and an additional \$700,000 in state general funds for the Infant Learning Program, serving children under three at-risk for or experiencing developmental disabilities and delays.

Legislators established a special account in the general fund for a comprehensive anti-smoking education, tobacco use prevention, and tobacco control program (20% of the Master Settlement Act receipts each year will go into this fund). They also passed a bill to take advantage of a federal law allowing states to help women diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer who, until now, earned too much for regular Medicaid but not enough to buy health insurance.

Idaho

The appropriation for public health services (including EMS and the public health lab) went up 8.5% to \$53 million in FY2002.

Besides a 4.5% increase in employee compensation, the increase will support several children's health programs, including the provision of combination vaccines in addition to single dose antigens (\$818,000), and a \$2.5 million plus commitment to provide Prevnar to immunize children against pneumococcal disease. Idaho was the first state to provide the vaccine (part of a supplemental budget request) to all children in the state beginning in Dec. 2000.

Montana

The State Department of Public Health and Human Services gained permission to increase Medicaid rates for ambulance providers, dental providers, some physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and hospitals. In addition, the legislature amended the statute for the Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP) to allow the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) to contract directly with providers on a fee-for-service basis. This authority was needed to pay for expanded mental health services for children enrolled in both the Mental Health Service Plan and CHIP. The amendment also allows DPHHS to reduce services or lower the poverty level to control program growth. The portion of the bill that would have allowed DPHHS to raise the poverty level to 160% of poverty was amended to 150%, the original language, and no new funding was appropriated.

Oregon

Total funding for public health, including state general fund, other funds generated by fees and grants, and federal funds, increased 3.9% from the last biennium 1999-2001, up to \$329.9 million. Total estimated special payments to counties for the 2001-2003 biennium are \$200.5 million, an increase of 5.5% from the last biennium.

Major public health legislation passed this session focused on tobacco use, with an additional \$5 million for the statewide tobacco education and prevention program, and for children's health. The newborn metabolic screening program (screening for rare and potentially deadly newborn metabolic disorders) was expanded through a raised fee cap; emergency medical services for children received \$200,000; and the juvenile diabetes database received \$100,000. An additional \$500,000 each went to minority health initiatives and statewide local water fluoridation implementation efforts.

State legislators wrapped up their 2001 sessions with a variety of decisions affecting public health. Here are a few highlights from the six Northwest states.

Washington

Washington's I-695 in 1999 reduced funding for local public health directly by \$26 million per year. The legislature provided state funding for 90% of that loss, and renewed the funding in 2001 for the next biennium.

The new budget included funding for the vaccine PCV7 in the state's universal immunization program, an additional \$5 million over the biennium for the state's tobacco prevention and control efforts, and the first state general fund money to support state and local efforts regulating the Group B water systems, as well as state compliance with new federal requirements.

Key legislation included an infant and child safety bill requiring the State Department of Health to develop information on recalled products for parents and providers, and a bill on access to dental sealants.

Wyoming

The legislature passed a bill authorizing public health offices to charge fees for all services except immunizations, follow-up on communicable diseases, and the public health nursing infant visitation program. The maximum fee for service allowed is \$200, and public notice is required for establishment of a fee schedule.

The legislation also appropriated \$500,000 to the State Department of Health to expand coverage for services to qualified individuals in need of end stage renal dialysis.