

TITLE: The Time is Now: Why Elected Officials Need to Hear from Public Health Experts Now More Than Ever

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STUDENT SUBMISSION: No

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Oregon public health and health care practitioners, researchers, and students in the state and local public health departments and in other settings who care about and address the health and wellbeing of Oregon communities, especially vulnerable and marginalized people; Community members who advocate to improve their community's and individual health and wellbeing; decision and policy makers.

ABSTRACT: The underpinning of America's democratic republic is that elected lawmakers represent their constituents in their decision making. However, elected legislators cannot be experts on all topics. As experts in their field, frontline public health professionals are well positioned to educate legislators about the connections between public policy and health outcomes, and advocate for the necessary funding to make change. Yet few engage with their legislators or community members. Recent events like the COVID-19 pandemic, worldwide protests against racism and police brutality, and climate change have exacerbated and drawn heightened attention to health disparities. The last two years have also brought significant turnover of the public health workforce, particularly at the leadership level. It will take consistent, coordinated advocacy efforts over time to fully address health inequities and mend historical injustices to improve public health in Oregon. Some Oregon legislators are strong public health allies. Others need exposure to public health principles and education about how public health investments deliver a high return on investment in the form of improved public health emergency response, lower healthcare costs, reduced disease and injuries, and improved health outcomes. In this session, learn from leaders at the Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA) and the Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO) about what you need to know in order to more fully engage in advocacy as citizens who are public health experts, and how you can partner to make the case to your elected officials at the local and state levels to support policy and funding for needed prevention services for people throughout Oregon.

OBJECTIVE(S): Recognize the importance of advocating for adequate policy funding that supports the social determinants of health and health equity. Learn at least three methods to advocate for public health policy. Understand how, as citizens, public health professionals can engage and be heard. Commit to at least 3 action steps that you will take from now through the next legislative session to advocate for full funding from the state for Oregon's public health system. Explore and strategize how partner organizations and community members served by local public health authorities can be better advocates for public health here in Oregon.
