



Texas Public Health Coalition

The Texas Public Health Coalition is a coalition of health professional organizations and health-focused organizations dedicated to disease prevention and health promotion.

**TO:** House Bill 1 Conferees  
**FROM:** Texas Public Health Coalition  
**SUBJECT:** Please Maximize Key Public Health Investments in Budget  
**DATE:** April 25, 2019

#### MEMBERS

Alzheimer's Association  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
American Heart Association  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Texas  
Children's Hospital Association of Texas  
The Cooper Institute  
Harris County Public Health  
The Immunization Partnership  
March of Dimes  
Methodist Healthcare Ministries  
Texas Academy of Family Physicians  
Texas Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
Texas Academy of Physician Assistants  
Texas Association of City & County Health Officials  
Texas Association of Community Health Centers  
Texas eHealth Alliance  
Texas Health Institute  
Texas Hospital Association  
Texas Medical Association  
Texas Nurses Association  
Texas Oral Health Coalition, Inc.  
Texas Osteopathic Medical Association  
Texas Pediatric Society  
Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility  
Texas Public Health Association  
Texas Renal Coalition  
Texas School Nurses Organization  
Texas State Alliance of YMCAs  
United Ways of Texas

#### RESOURCES

Bexar County Medical Society  
Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas  
Harris County Public Health  
MD Anderson Cancer Center  
Michael and Susan Dell Center For Healthy Living  
Partnership for a Healthy Texas  
Travis County Medical Society  
Texas Department of State Health Services

Dear Chairman Zerwas and Conference Committee Members:

On behalf of the more than 30 member organizations of the Texas Public Health Coalition, we thank committee members for their attentive consideration to Texas' public health funding priorities during the budget process to date. In general, we are encouraged by funding amounts proposed in House Bill 1 and the Senate Committee Substitute to House Bill 1, and we respectfully present our recommendation to **please maximize key public health investments in the final 2020-2021 budget**. These investments will equip the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to detect and prevent disease, respond to emerging threats, and protect Texans' health and well-being. We emphasize support for several priority items below:

#### Safeguard the State Public Health Laboratory

We are pleased to see \$17.5 million in both House and Senate budgets to address the state laboratory budget shortfall, and \$7.7 million in the Senate budget and House supplemental budget to implement newborn screening for X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy. These investments will enable the laboratory to continue delivering accurate, reliable, and prompt test results for high-risk, high-consequence diseases. Our coalition would like to underscore the importance of sustained investments in equipment upgrades, facility maintenance, and market-value pay for skilled staff to optimize laboratory function.

#### Combat Maternal Morbidity and Mortality and Improve Vital Records Management

DSHS must be able to build on existing efforts to keep new mothers in Texas healthy and safe. Please consider investing \$7 million to fully fund expanded implementation of DSHS' TexasAIM maternal safety bundles. In addition, high-quality vital records data is critical for accurate surveillance of public health trends, including maternal mortality. We recommend full funding of \$3 million for DSHS exceptional item to improve security, quality, and capacity in the state vital records department.

#### Improve Quality and Accessibility of Public Health Data

DSHS' capacity to manage, analyze, and disseminate public health data directly influences whether state and local public health entities can make decisions with the best available information. Enabling DSHS to continue supplying accurate, up-to-date data increases the likelihood that public resources will be used responsibly. Currently, neither the House nor Senate budgets appropriate any funds for improving public health data infrastructure. We respectfully ask the committee consider fulfilling the agency's request of \$4.5 million to address this key priority.

#### Include Economic Study of Vaccine Preventable Disease Outbreak (DSHS Rider 30, HB 1)

As committee members may be aware, 15 cases of measles have been confirmed in Texas this year.<sup>1</sup> Right now in New York and Washington state, ongoing measles outbreaks totaling hundreds of cases have clustered in communities with low vaccine coverage. With a 2,300 percent rise in nonmedical vaccine exemptions in Texas since 2003-04<sup>2</sup> and studies finding numerous under-immunized counties in Texas,<sup>3</sup> today's outbreaks in New York and Washington could easily foreshadow tomorrow's reality in Texas. A rapid, thorough, and coordinated response from local and state health departments is essential to contain outbreaks of vaccine preventable disease, and to avoid potential harm and loss of life.

To ensure public resources are used efficiently, it is important to accurately tabulate and plan for costs associated with a comprehensive public health intervention in outbreak-affected communities. In addition,

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it is crucial to understand the extent to which our state and local economies suffer due to outbreaks of vaccine preventable disease.

In Article II of HB 1, DSHS Rider 30 directs the department to study the overall economic impact and costs to the department and local public health entities incurred in responding to vaccine preventable disease outbreaks. Importantly, this study would be conducted out of existing appropriations and would not have any additional fiscal impact to the state. We strongly encourage committee members to include DSHS Rider 30 in HB 1 in the final budget.

**Permit DSHS to Use Paid Media to Combat Tobacco (DSHS Rider 19, HB 1)**

The tobacco industry deploys multimillion-dollar marketing campaigns to cultivate a new generation of smokers in Texas. A provision in the current Senate budget would prevent DSHS from using paid media in antismoking campaigns. Our coalition supports DSHS Rider 19 as it appears in the House budget, eliminating the paid media restriction. The state must not disadvantage itself in challenging predatory tobacco industry messaging.

We strongly support full funding for these public health priorities and thank the committee for the opportunity to comment. Our coalition stands ready to assist with any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of State Health Services. (2019 April 5). News Updates. Retrieved from <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/news/updates.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> Texas Department of State Health Services. (2019). Vaccination coverage levels in Texas schools. Retrieved from: <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/coverage/schools/>

<sup>3</sup> Olive, J. K., Hotez, P. J., Damania, A., & Nolan, M. S. (2018). The state of the antivaccine movement in the United States: A focused examination of nonmedical exemptions in states and counties. *PLoS Medicine*, *15*(6), e1002578.

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2019 Texas Public Health Coalition Member Organizations



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