

Protecting Local Public Health: Why Cuts Hurt Communities

Information Brief – September 2025

Acknowledging the Budget Reality

Colorado faces serious budget challenges, and nearly every part of state government is being asked to do more with less. Local public health agencies (LPHAs) are not exempt — they are facing a \$3 million, or **14%, cut to their core state funding**. While \$3 million may look modest on paper, the impact is significant: these flexible dollars are the foundation that keep communities safe and healthy.

What This Funding Does

Unlike most federal grants that come with restrictions, this state funding allows local agencies to respond to the unique needs of their communities. It gives them the flexibility to direct resources where they're needed most and ensures the core services Coloradans rely on every day, such as:

- **Immunization clinics** that prevent disease outbreaks in schools and workplaces.
- **Restaurant and childcare inspections** that keep food and facilities safe.
- **Emergency response** for floods, fires, and outbreaks.
- **Maternal and child health programs** that prevent infant deaths and support young families.

When this funding is cut, it's not an abstract budget number — it's fewer nurses, inspectors, and community health workers on the ground.

What a 14% Cut Means

- In a rural county, it could mean losing the only public health nurse who provides vaccinations or pregnancy support.
- In a mountain community, it could mean fewer restaurant and lodging inspections during peak tourist season, increasing risks for foodborne illness among residents and visitors.
- In an urban county, it could mean slower response to rising overdose rates or outbreaks of infectious disease, costing lives and increasing hospital strain.

Colorado already has some of the smallest public health agencies in the nation. One in four can't meet even the most basic staffing needs¹. A 14% cut doesn't just reduce budgets — it widens the gap, putting children, families, and entire communities at greater risk.

¹ 2023 Colorado Public Health Workforce Gaps and Needs Assessment
https://www.calpho.org/uploads/6/8/7/2/68728279/2023_ph_workforce_gaps_and_needs_assessment_3_11.pdf

Why This Matters Now

Public health is most visible when it fails — when outbreaks spread, when food is unsafe, when disasters overwhelm local response. Sustained investment keeps communities safer, healthier, and ultimately saves the state money by preventing costly emergencies down the line.

A Better Way Forward

We recognize that tough decisions are required in a budget crisis. But even in times of austerity, Colorado cannot afford to undermine the very system that prevents disease, keeps kids in school, and protects local economies from disruption.

Protecting local public health funding is not just about agencies — it's about protecting every Coloradan.

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