

Deschutes County Public Health (DCPH) has multiple priorities for expanding public health modernization programming to ensure a robust and sustainable local public health department that is responsive to the needs of our community. As we continue to move beyond the COVID pandemic, there are many lessons to be learned and other emerging public health issues that need attention. Early on in public health modernization planning, we realized that Epidemiology was an area in which we were greatly lacking and needed to be prioritized. Being able to collect and analyze data in order to make informed decisions about our community's health is critical. We also realized a gap in providing needed communicable disease prevention services to harder to reach groups and congregate settings where the majority of outbreaks were happening. Serving the entire community means ensuring that everyone has access to what they need to be healthy. This initial work has been expanded by creating positions that increase our capacity to meet the growing needs in epidemiology and communicable disease prevention and response.

Due to public health modernization, we are excited to also grow our capacity in work that targets conditions in our natural environment that are ravaging Oregon. Our regional Climate and Health Coordinator focuses on preparing communities for wildfires, wildfire smoke, excessive heat, drought and vector-borne communicable diseases through education, interventions, and response. These issues are the new reality, and we must act now as there has been too much hesitation and ambivalence to these threats.

As we head into this next biennium, we are turning our attention to foundational capabilities of public health. During COVID, we increased communication efforts, developed new community partnerships and expanded outreach services to underserved communities. We are committed to continuing these efforts, even after COVID resources end, and sustaining this core work with health equity at the center of all of it. DCPH will continue to build strong partnerships with public health partners and organizations in Central Oregon. Working collaboratively is the only way we can comprehensively address the large public health issues facing our county and region. All of this work will take time to fully realize, but with the right foundation and collaborative spirit, anything is possible in Public Health!