



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH

House Appropriations Committee
Department of Health Budget Hearing

Testimony of
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Good morning, Chairman Harris, Chairman Grove, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee to discuss Governor Shapiro's proposed 2024-2025 Fiscal Year budget for the Department of Health. I am joined today by Executive Deputy Secretary Kristen Rodack, Chief Financial Officer Andrea Race, and Deputy Secretary for Administration Danielle Pierre.

Governor Shapiro's proposed budget continues to support the Department in its mission to assure all Pennsylvanians can live healthy lifestyles, prevent injury and disease, and have access to safe, quality health care. Through investments in continuous quality improvement in long-term care facilities to funding for better maternal health outcomes, and relief for residents burdened by medical debt, this budget makes great strides to care for all of our residents, from our youngest to our oldest Pennsylvanians.

Before we discuss the proposed budget, I'd like to share a few examples of what the Department accomplished in the past year:

- We made further investments in Pennsylvania's public health infrastructure and workforce by leveraging funding from the CDC Public Health Infrastructure Grant. With this funding, the Department has started significant infrastructure projects, including data modernization efforts, and filled gaps in personnel to ensure comprehensive public health services across the Commonwealth.
- We successfully implemented updates to the Long-term Care Nursing Facility regulations that were promulgated in December 2022. Throughout the implementation of the updated regulations, the Department worked closely with the regulated community and partners to be responsive to concerns and questions about the regulations.
- With support provided in last year's budget, we created the Division of Maternal Health Services within the Bureau of Family Health to ensure the recommendations of the Maternal Mortality Review Committee result in actionable efforts in collaboration with agency partners and stakeholders.
- The Office of Drug Surveillance and Misuse Prevention purchased, organized, and disseminated over 40,000 doses of naloxone, 300,000 drug testing strips, and nearly 12,000 naloxone leave behind kits. These life-saving supplies were provided to harm

reduction organizations, local health departments, public safety agencies, PA DOH program offices, and other community organizations.

Improving Maternal Health

As a pediatrician and mother, the health and well-being of Pennsylvania's children and families remains one of my top priorities. The Governor's proposed budget allocates \$5 million in maternal health funding to support ongoing work necessary to protect pregnant women and their families. Of this, \$2.3 million would continue the work the Department is already doing to build the necessary infrastructure to prevent maternal deaths and medical complications. The additional \$2.7 million proposed by the Governor would be dedicated to promoting maternal health education, enhancing prenatal care, addressing racial and geographic disparities in maternal care, and strengthening support systems to ensure that every pregnant woman has a safe and healthy pregnancy, birth, and postpartum period.

Enhancing Care for Older Pennsylvanians

The Governor's proposed budget continues to support necessary investments to ensure older Pennsylvanians receive quality care. With a proposed investment of \$10 million to support the Department's Long-Term Care Transformation Office, we can continue to provide guidance, technical assistance, and support to long-term care facilities across Pennsylvania to ensure quality care for older adults.

The Long-Term Care Transformation Office is focused on long-term care workforce resiliency, infection prevention and control, emergency preparedness, and sustainable outbreak response operations to help protect residents at long-term care facilities. This proposed investment would support the efforts of several state agencies and stakeholders to ensure that older adults living in these communities receive the best care possible.

The Governor's proposed budget also includes additional funding to enhance our ability to respond to complaints and concerns about the care of residents in long-term care nursing facilities. A critical function of the Department is to safeguard the care and health of residents in nursing homes, and this additional funding would ensure that we are able to maintain these standards for all Pennsylvanians who require higher levels of care.

Reducing the Burden of Medical Debt

The cost of health care, especially as a result of unforeseen hospital stays, has long-term effects on the health and finances of Pennsylvanians, which disproportionately impacts low-income and rural communities. Nearly 1 in 10 Pennsylvanians have medical debt that has been carried over to collection agencies. Residents with medical debt often forgo regular, preventive medical care due to the fear of accruing more debt. Delays in medical care can lead to more significant health care needs, worse health outcomes, and higher health care costs. From an economic perspective, medical debt contributes to individual financial struggles leading to credit, employment and even housing issues, all of which are associated with negative health outcomes. This budget proposes allocating \$4 million to help reduce millions of dollars in crushing medical debt for Pennsylvanians who need it.

Supporting Our First Responders

One of my priorities has been to engage and collaborate with partners across the Commonwealth. To that end, I have personally met with all of the Emergency Medical Services Regional Councils to discuss how best to improve services for residents across the Commonwealth. While not directly under the purview of the Department of Health, I am pleased to support the Governor's proposed investments in emergency medical services (EMS) professionals and firefighters. These men and women put their lives on the line every time they are called to duty. They deserve our support in every way possible, and providing grants for equipment, facility upgrades, training, and recruitment is the least we can do.

Taking Care of Students

Finally, I would be remiss not to highlight the Governor's proposed historic investment in the health of our students. We want to ensure all of Pennsylvania's students have their health care needs met while in school. Unfortunately, an estimated 25 percent of our female students have missed class or school due to the lack of available menstrual hygiene products. Studies show that poor menstrual hygiene practices due to lack of access to products can have long-term health consequences. Governor Shapiro has recommended dedicating funding to make sure that our students have access to these necessary hygiene products at school, allowing them to remain in the classroom and on the path to success.

I look forward to working with you all to help implement this budget proposal that would enhance the lives of all Pennsylvanians.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and discuss the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Health. I am happy to take any questions you may have for me or my team.