

Core Public Health - Infectious Disease Laboratory Capacity

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
General Fund				
Expenditures	200	200	200	200
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact	200	200	200	200

Summary

This proposal seeks \$200,000 per year from the General Fund for the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Infectious Disease Laboratory (IDL) to maintain its capacity to perform core public health testing.

Background

Infectious diseases are a significant public health concern and cause thousands and illnesses and deaths each year in Minnesota. To address these ongoing threats, as well as emerging infectious disease threats, the public health system needs to maintain laboratory capacity to enable rapid and accurate detection, and response to emerging health threats. For this purpose, MDH operates the state's Infectious Disease Laboratory.

In Fiscal Year 2012, the IDL performed 44,450 tests to monitor infectious disease trends and investigate infectious disease outbreaks. Many of the pathogens analyzed by the IDL are traditional pathogens of public health concern, including tuberculosis, syphilis and HIV. However, in addition to monitoring these well-known disease threats, the

IDL implements new test methods to detect emerging diseases and to investigate unexplained deaths and serious illness for which a pathogen has not been identified. For example, the IDL was the first laboratory in the state to detect the West Nile Virus.

The results of testing performed by the IDL are used in part by health care providers for individual patient treatment. The data are also used by MDH for purposes of disease monitoring, outbreak investigation, and evaluation of preventive strategies to protect the health of the public.

Funding for core infectious disease testing capacity has steadily decreased. Current funds no longer cover the growing cost of maintaining a highly sophisticated laboratory and performing testing. Laboratory equipment costs are soaring, and with them the cost of maintaining and repairing complex instrumentation.

Proposal

The appropriation in this proposal will enable IDL to sustain core laboratory activities in the areas of

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foodborne disease, tuberculosis, rabies and sexually transmitted infections by providing general fund support for two existing FTEs, laboratory testing supplies, information technology (IT) support, and maintenance of equipment used for testing. Funds will also be used for improvements to the Laboratory Information Management System, which will promote electronic information exchange and decrease reporting time by one to two days.

Rationale

This proposal will enable MDH to maintain a robust infectious disease lab that provides timely, accurate information about infectious disease threats and perform core public health testing.

MDH currently relies upon a shrinking supply of funding to support core testing activities at the IDL. The IDL is permitted to charge only a \$25 handling fee for each diagnostic specimen submitted for testing and receives the fee on only approximately 30 percent of diagnostic specimens it processes. The remainder is exempt from the fee.

Federal grant funding is typically targeted to specific activities and is not available to subsidize general capacity for diagnostic laboratory testing.

Therefore, because much of the testing performed by the IDL is either exempt from the handling fee, or is not funded by federal grants, the IDL relies on state funds to cover core public health testing.

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