



**Department of State Health Services
Legislative Appropriations Request, 2014-15
Texas Medical Association Testimony Presented by Travis Bias, DO
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The Texas Medical Association recently developed a comprehensive, strategic roadmap for our state's health care system based on the largest threats to the health of our patients and communities. **TMA's Healthy Vision 2020: Caring for Patients in a Time of Change** discusses Texas' top public health issues of this decade and provides the association's recommendations. Texas Department of State Health Services' (DSHS') Legislative Appropriations Request for 2014-15 highlights many of the paramount health issues examined in the association's Healthy Vision 2020.

Texas physicians agree the state must invest in its public health infrastructure, especially now. Public health in Texas is tied to the viability and stability of our state economy. If we do not protect our workforce from infectious and preventable disease, ultimately the state's income will suffer. A strong public health system is insurance against the things we know destroy economic systems: instability, lost work time, and unnecessary expenditure of resources.

Additionally, the growing number of older Texans during the coming decades will have dramatic consequences for our public health system, along with health care financing and delivery, informal caregiving, and pensions. Older adults and more chronic disease will further strain resources in Texas counties, where basic public health concerns (e.g., control of infectious diseases, and maternal and child health) are not addressed fully.

Unfortunately, Texas' public health framework of previous decades has been largely ignored. Public health functions such as disease registries and surveillance systems have not kept up with the accelerated changes of health information technology. Many registries and systems are not widely accessible nor do they contain data timely enough for effective intervention.

Physicians face many challenges in caring for patients with preventable illnesses and complications. Collaborating with public health is a way for physicians to maximize limited resources and capacity, and address factors in Texas communities that influence health. That is why Texas physicians support the exceptional items requested by DSHS and want to express our deep concerns with the proposed 10-percent reductions to DSHS' base budget for 2014-15. While we understand DSHS has followed a careful process to meet the requirements for a 10-

percent reduction, we know that many critical programs and the state's public health will be seriously affected if these cuts are made.

Strong Adult Vaccination Safety Net Needed

- **Adult immunizations:** Recent state and federal funding reductions damaged the state's adult vaccination safety net. With more than one in four Texans uninsured, Texas needs a strong local and state public health system to complement the vaccinations that physicians and other health care workers provide. We therefore support DSHS's recommendation for Exceptional Item No. 3 for adult immunization funding. TMA will support state efforts consistent with the recommendations of the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).
- **Pertussis outbreak:** The ongoing outbreak of pertussis in Texas underscores the need for a strong adult safety net that can respond promptly to continuing infectious diseases events. Vulnerable populations, such as infants and children are fully protected only when the community around them is vaccinated. Over the past decade, that state has had to respond to pertussis, meningococcal, and influenza outbreaks.
- **Childcare worker vaccinations:** TMA followed ACIP guidance in 2011 when we worked with lawmakers to pass a new law requiring health care facilities to have a policy on health care worker vaccination. It is equally important to ensure adults who care for young children in childcare centers also are immunized appropriately. DSHS currently is required to provide childcare facilities important vaccination information. TMA believes it is now time to expand state efforts by developing education and vaccination campaigns for childcare workers stressing the importance of immunizations. Most states require vaccination documentation of childcare workers for certain communicable diseases. Therefore, we encourage you to dedicate exceptional item funding to promote vaccination of childcare workers. Childcare workers typically work in low-salaried positions and are uninsured. However, these individuals play an important role in teaching and protecting our children.

Smoke-Free Texas

- **Texas' Quitline and education:** TMA supports Exceptional Item No. 8 for tobacco cessation and chronic disease prevention. Texas households already pay more than \$560 each year for the costs of smoking in our state. We strongly support funding to increase tobacco cessation and prevention activities as part of Texas' Quitline counseling, and nicotine replacement therapy, media campaigns, and other programming targeted to young people. In 2013, organized medicine will work to join the list of 30 states that are smoke free.

Chronic Disease Prevention

- **Exercise and healthy food:** Texas must stop and reverse its obesity epidemic. Texas must invest in public health preventions that decrease obesity and the complex health problems associated with it. TMA strongly supports Exceptional Item No. 8 to continue community-based initiatives and worksite wellness programs promoting physical activity and access to healthy foods for our diverse Texas population.
- With one out of three Texas school children (10-17 years) already obese, we know that in the next two decades chronic conditions associated with smoking, overweight, and obesity will crush our health system and cost Texas' economy more than \$32 billion in higher insurance costs, absenteeism, and other costly effects.

- Texas physicians every day care for patients with devastating chronic illnesses — many preventable with exercise and a proper diet. It is essential that DSHS’ 2014-15 appropriations for chronic disease address community-based approaches to promote physical activity and healthy eating. We believe these efforts have the greatest potential for slowing the proportion of overweight and obesity in Texas children and adults.

Preventive and Reproductive Care for Women

- ***Women’s health services:*** TMA applauds DSHS for its development of Exceptional Item No. 6 for primary care expansion to ensure low-income and uninsured women receive care. More than one million Texas women, aged 15-44 do not have access to basic wellness and preventive care. TMA strongly support DSHS’s efforts to help low-income women receive cost-effective basic health care screenings — such as for cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes — as well as birth control. This is the only source of such preventive care for many of these women.
- Our organizations strongly support funding to expand the Women’s Health Program for which Texas will be completely responsible beginning Nov. 1. The program, coupled with DSHS-funded programs, provides essential preventive health services to more than 100,000 women. Without the program, Texas will experience more unplanned pregnancies and lost opportunities to identify treatable health conditions among low-income women. Women who have had a Medicaid-funded delivery are at particularly high risk for subsequent pregnancy, often so soon that risks of prematurity and low birth weight are elevated. Babies born too soon or too small often have significant health problems, such as respiratory or developmental delays, contributing to higher medical costs at birth and as the child ages. In 2007, unplanned Medicaid births cost the state more than \$1.2 billion.
- TMA strongly support efforts to restore the 2011 federal funds to help DSHS rebuild quality, community-based health care for Texas’ low-income women. We believe this is most efficient and effective use of these federal funds.

Public Health Infrastructure

- ***Disease outbreaks and disaster response:*** TMA supports Exceptional Item No. 4 to increase the agency’s capacity to investigate and respond to foodborne and other disease outbreaks. Physicians are on the front line of identifying and treating foodborne illnesses and infectious diseases. We need to have a strong disease reporting system and timely health communications that inform physicians on potential health threats. The current collaboration between physicians and public health in Dallas County to address West Nile virus underscores how we can effectively work together to inform and protect our patients.
- Physicians believe we must continue to invest in our state’s public health infrastructure in order to address costly health concerns and to prevent paying an even higher price tag in the future. Texas’ exploding population in our large and mobile state means we need to ensure we have a robust statewide surveillance system, an adequately trained public health workforce, and the capacity to respond to old and new public health concerns.
- We need a public health infrastructure that not only responds to current threats but can also identify emerging health issues. The state’s public health infrastructure is strained and has been for years. Texas is not addressing critical health issues, such as the increase in maternal deaths in the state. A maternal mortality review system is needed, especially because the state has 10 percent of all births in the United States.

Invest in Mental Health Services

- ***Mental health funding:*** TMA supports Exception Items No. 1, 5, 7, and 10 to increase or maintain access to quality mental health care services and supportive programs for those with mental health or substance abuse problems. TMA is a long-time advocate for increased funding for community-based mental health and substance abuse care. Investments made in 2009 and 2011 to strengthen the state's mental health system helped bolster and sustain a foundation for the state's community-based mental health and "crisis" services. As a result, the state improved Texans' lives, while reducing its costs.
- While Texas has recently made significant investments in community mental health services, we still rank 50th in state public mental health funding per capita.
- TMA is greatly concerned about potential cuts in state funding.
- More than 4.3 million Texans, including 1.2 million children, live with some form of mental health disorder. Of these, 1.5 million cannot function at work, school, or in the community due to their illness. A 10-percent cut in mental health service funds will put additional stress on an already over-burdened and under-funded system. People without access to mental health services will seek care in more expensive settings, such as the emergency room.
- Mental illness and substance abuse hurt the Texas economy through lost earning potential, treatment of coexisting conditions, disability payments, homelessness, and incarceration.
- Investing in mental health services ultimately pays for itself through reduced incarceration and emergency department costs.