

MEMORANDUM

TO: Snohomish County Council

FROM: Kara Main-Hester, Chief Recovery & Resilience Officer

DATE: August 21, 2023

RE: American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Proposal for Public Health

Background:

In 2023, the Snohomish County Health Department received an allocation of approximately \$2.5 million in ARPA funding to support the department's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, including support to child care facilities, schools, and any other congregate setting. This memo is meant to satisfy the ARPA Spending Plan required by the 2023 Adopted Budget Note No. 8

Proposed ARPA Programming

Based on conversations with department leadership, the following requests have been identified as priority areas to invest these federal funds that align with ARPA's goals of responding to the continuing health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including addressing barriers to vaccine and health care access among highly vulnerable communities, and helping impacted small businesses recover from the negative economic impacts associated with the pandemic.

Additionally, the department was provided an additional \$1 million for the Savvy Septic program within the Environmental Health Division. The program provides broad and affordable access to residential finance to replace on-site septic systems.

Below is the Health Department's proposed spend plan for its ARPA allocation. The spending plan is flexible and subject to change as additional outreach with internal and external partners is conducted and costs are further refined.

School and Child Care COVID-19 Support - \$711,000

FTEs are current project positions and planning to end this work December 31, 2023.

The department requested and was approved to hire five FTE to assist with congregate settings within the county with COVID-19 outbreaks and mitigation efforts. They currently meet with schools, child care providers, and summer camps to assist them when more than one child has COVID-19.

As the staff wrap up their activities, they are developing lessons learned and best practices in working with schools, child care, and other congregate settings, and the department will be ready to implement these strategies on an as-needed basis.

Food Permit Responsiveness - \$185,000

The department recommends investing \$185,000 to hire two FTE to assist prospective business owners in completing and submitting their applications for new food service establishment plan reviews. The restaurant industry was hit hard during the pandemic, so the Health Department would like to support prospective business owners realize revenue as quickly as possible, but the current review times are prohibitive. These two positions would be a pilot to learn if the additional customer assistance resources will help reduce the department's review times. If the positions are successful, the department will research other funding opportunities to extend the roles permanently in the future.

Inventory Septic System - \$400,000

The department proposes to complete a countywide inventory of all properties currently utilizing on-site sewage disposal. At this time, the department is only aware of properties that have been installed since the most recent software was implemented or properties that have been pumped or inspected since recordkeeping began. If approved, the list would be mapped using GIS and would be used in further septic monitoring and maintenance activities, such as targeted outreach for the Savvy Septic low-income repair incentive project and targeted enforcement activities related to shellfish bed harvest closures of Tribal interest.

Mobile Van Purchase - \$544,000

Due to the pandemic, there is an increase in vaccine hesitancy and a decrease in the number of individuals receiving vaccines. [Even prior to the pandemic, vaccine hesitancy had been an increasing concern](#), leading to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in pockets of the country where vaccination levels had dropped. An example of this was in 2019 when there was an unusually high number of measles outbreaks in communities with low vaccination coverage that [almost resulted in the United States losing its status as a country that had eliminated that disease](#).

After the release of the COVID-19 vaccine during the pandemic, hesitancy increased due to the polarized and politicized public discourse around vaccination against COVID-19 which expanded into other vaccine preventable diseases as well. This was illustrated by a [study released by the CDC](#) looking at vaccination coverage in kindergarten students which dropped from 95 percent in the 2019-2020 school year to 93 percent in 2021-2022 school year.

The department will purchase a mobile vehicle and outfit it with equipment and supplies to provide vaccinations to communities. By providing mobile vaccination support, we would be able to meet where people are, particularly at schools, and make appropriate vaccinations easier than obtaining exemptions or keeping kids home from school, and this is expected to help counteract this trend.

Equity Review Contract - \$100,000

Toward the end of 2021, a project was undertaken to evaluate our historically excluded communities view of the then-Health District's response to COVID-19. Part one of the two-part project was completed. This contract is to complete part two of this project.

Gold Standard Study – \$300,000

The department proposes working with a contractor/consultant to analyze department goals and objectives to continue the department's work to advance gold-standard public health policies and programs.

School Based Health Care Clinic Project – \$120,000

Department staff will explore the idea of collaborating with school(s) in Snohomish County to provide school-based health clinics. School-based health clinics are a proven cost-effective model to deliver health care in resource-limited communities. By adding in access to health care at schools we can reduce another barrier for vulnerable youth and families.

Environmental Health Software Upgrade - \$140,000

The department plans on upgrading the software system that the Environmental Health (EH) Division uses for its daily functions. The tasks include permit applications, food establishment inspections, septic system submittals/repairs, appeals and point of sale. The EH software is critical to EH daily functions. Having a well-functioning software system that is easy to use and teach, access remotely, and is set up for all of EH's required workflows will make the division more efficient and provide better customer experience

Timeline

Given the urgency of need in the community and ARPA's compressed timeline, the Health Department's intention is to have this funding available via competitive processes or contracting by early 2024.

Expenditures and outcomes associated with investments will be available through quarterly U.S. Treasury reporting and the County's [COVID-19 Recovery Dashboard](#).