

# SURVEY OF COUNTY ATTORNEYS ON AN OREGON PUBLIC HEALTH LAW CENTER

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# Background

- Policy changes have great potential to improve population health
- Much of the innovation and progress in public health policy occurs at the local level



- Enacting laws to improve health at the city, county and state levels requires specific knowledge of the state's legal landscape and public health environment

# Background

- In the policy change process, it can be helpful to know:
  - What are the health impacts of various policy options?
  - How do you design, and draft policies, to implement the best policy option?
- Public health law centers conduct legal analyses and research to enhance efforts that use law and policy to improve population health

# Survey of County Attorneys

- Structured interviews
- Conducted by telephone
- 20 completed surveys
- Questions included:
  - Experience with public health law
  - Know of public health law legal resources
  - Interest in getting assistance from a public health law center

# Survey of County Attorneys

- Common public health law issues were those related to tobacco and privacy of health records
- In addition, county attorneys desired more assistance in addressing the opioid epidemic
- Desire for model policies, and to know the policies in other counties
- The county attorneys currently use their statewide listserve when public health law questions arise
- The assistant county attorneys in Multnomah and Washington counties were seen as a good resources

# Survey of County Attorneys

- Overwhelming response was that a public health law center would be a valuable resource for county attorneys
- Among the other public health law resources, most attorneys were familiar with only ChangeLab Solutions
- Almost all the county attorneys said that they would prefer the resource of an Oregon public health law center versus a nationally-based center

# Public Health Law Resources

- ChangeLab Solutions, Oakland, CA
- Network for Public Health Law
  - 5 regional offices – Western region is based in Arizona, covers Texas to Alaska
  - The Network gets many more calls from states that are closer to a regional office
- Tobacco Control Legal Consortium
- About 5 other more locally focused public health law centers around the country, mostly in the Northeast U.S.

# Oregon Public Health Law Center

- Practitioners working on public health policies need the expertise of lawyers with experience in public health law
  - Non-profit health organizations often do not have lawyers or researchers on their staffs
  - Cities and counties have access to staff or contracted attorneys, but these attorneys may not have expertise in public health law
- Who would use an Oregon public health law center?
  - Health departments and other government agencies
  - Community organizations
  - Elected officials
  - Businesses



# Oregon Public Health Law Center

- Possible projects for a public health law center
  - Analysis of the impact of laws and policies on the health of vulnerable populations (pre and post)
    - Assessing the health impacts of tax reform in Oregon
  - Training offered to elected officials and their staffs on timely, important health law topics
  - Technical assistance to city and county agencies working on local ordinances that impact health (e.g., improving nutrition, transportation policies)
  - Survey of legislative staff on public health matters, including how they obtain information on health issues

# Where do legislative staff get information about health policy issues?

(open-end, multiple responses)

Selected responses	
Media/News/Newspapers/TV/Radio	41%
Lobbyists/Advocates	41%
Other legislators and staff	34%
State agency - OHA/DHS	22%
Internet	15%
Journals, studies, research	7%
Testimony/Committee Hearings	6%

Source: Survey of Oregon Legislative Staff, 2013

# Oregon Public Health Law Center

- Why have a public health law center in Oregon?
  - Oregon has been a leader in passing public health laws, such as laws banning the sale of soda in schools, mandating workplace accommodations for nursing mothers, chain restaurant menu labeling, sale of tobacco to age 21
  - Adoption of health-promoting policies is part of the growing movement towards creating healthier communities across the state
- An Oregon-based public health law center could help accelerate this progress, providing technical assistance tailored to practitioners working in Oregon
- Policy work is one of the required foundational capabilities for health departments under Oregon's public health modernization efforts

# Oregon Public Health Law Center

- Possible funding sources
  - Healthcare foundations with a presence in Oregon
  - Other Oregon foundations interested in health
  - Contracts and grants from government agencies
  - Legislative appropriation
  - After we show financial support in Oregon, we can reach out to national funders

# Oregon Public Health Law Center

- Steering Committee includes:
  - Oregon State University
  - Oregon Health & Science University
  - Portland State University
  - Lewis & Clark Law School
  - Willamette University College of Law
  - Oregon Department of Justice
  - Coalition of Local Health Officials
  - American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
  - Oregon Health Equity Alliance
  - Oregon Healthiest State
  - Oregon Public Health Institute
  - Oregon Public Health Association
  - Upstream Public Health

# Oregon Public Health Law Center

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