

Tracking Public Health Funding - Challenges and Solutions

Excerpted and Adapted from the 2020 Core Public Health Services Needs Assessment Report

In response to Colorado’s “Shaping a State of Health: Colorado’s Plan for Improving Public Health and the Environment, 2015-2019” (PHIP), The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials (CALPHO) formed a workgroup to explore ways of maximizing public health funding in Colorado. The group recommended initiating an effort to transform the governmental public health system into one that is not just adequately funded, but predictably and sustainably funded. That effort continues through the Public Health Transformation Movement.

The workgroup encountered a long-standing challenge to this vision: the lack of a clear, aggregate financial picture for governmental public health, and significant barriers to creating this picture. This is partially a result of the decentralized public health system and lack of a uniform accounting practices (including state and local governments operating on different fiscal calendars) that makes tracking systemwide finances difficult.

The decades-old structure of federal public health funding – mostly through siloed, uncoordinated programmatic grants and transitory emergency funding – presents the most significant barriers to tracking. Individual programs often track their own performance and are able to conduct limited economic analyses, but these do not roll up to a system-wide picture. Federal programmatic siloes create and reinforce siloes at the state and local levels. Government agencies conduct regular fiscal reporting, but the results are not structured for economic analysis nor easily combined with other agencies’ varying methods.

Two projects began in 2023 aim to address these challenges:

- CDPHE’s Office of Public Health Practice, Planning, & Local Partnerships (OPHP) is developing a financial data flow and dashboard (Figure 1) that will display all the program grants and contracts for which each LPHA is responsible. This will eventually provide a large piece of the funding puzzle while reducing some of the administrative burden of managing multiple, siloed grants. Unfortunately, historical records of the systemwide revenues and expenditures don’t exist in structured formats, meaning that our ability to understand longitudinal patterns in funding is limited.
- CALPHO contracted with Government Performance Solutions (GPS) to develop profiles for each funding stream and source. These profiles will include multiple attributes for each source such as funding period of time, amounts, distribution formulas, reporting burden, and eligibility requirements. Most importantly, they will provide explanations of how changes are typically made and what policy levers are available to CALPHO to improve the adequacy, effectiveness, and infrastructure support.

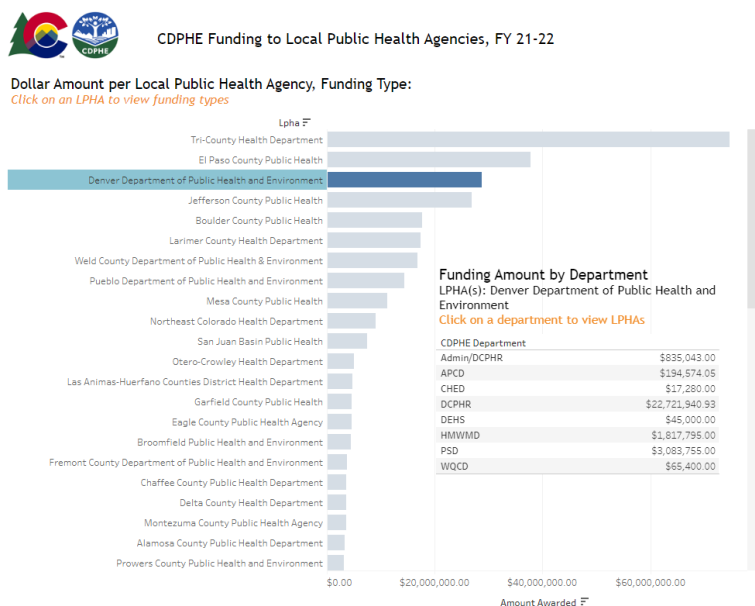


Figure 1: CDPHE Funding to LPHAs dashboard (courtesy CDPHE-OPHP)