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Frederick County Health Department

News Release

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT REDUCES PUBLIC SERVICES FOLLOWING STATE BUDGET CUTS

FREDERICK, MD – Due to recent state budget cuts coupled with budgetary reductions implemented earlier this year, the Frederick County Health Department today notified citizens of a decrease in core public health services and a departmental reorganization due to a reduction of employee positions.

Frederick County Health Officer, Dr. Barbara Brookmyer, said, “Our citizens have come to rely upon the services we provide at the Health Department, many of which will now be diminished significantly and in some cases, eliminated entirely. I owe a debt of gratitude to the men and women who committed themselves to public service and embraced in a professional manner the often challenging situations their jobs presented. The passion for public health exhibited by the persons who will lose their jobs makes the situation more painful.”

In August, the Maryland Board of Public Works reduced the Frederick County Health Department’s current fiscal year 2010 budget for core public health services by \$814,000 and reduced the budget by 25 percent for cancer screening and tobacco prevention and cessation. Core funding had already been reduced at the end of fiscal 2009 by \$464,000. State support for core public health services in Frederick is currently on the level of 1997 funding.

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As a result of budget cuts in fiscal year 2009, the Health Department reduced core public health services staff by an average of 15 percent. State tobacco prevention, cessation and enforcement funding was reduced by two thirds from fiscal year 2009 to fiscal year 2010. Citizens are currently experiencing increased wait times for some services due to the reductions, and recent action by the Board of Public Works will significantly impact the availability of some services and the timeliness of others.

As approximately 98 percent of Health Department expenses are salaries, the degree of the budget cuts in August could not be absorbed by simply reducing operating costs. The relatively modest operating budget had already been reduced by 80 percent in fiscal year 2009.

Health Department officials carefully examined what services are not required to be provided by a local health department and what services may still be available to the public if the Health Department discontinues the provision of those services. They determined that family planning and sexually transmitted infection treatment services are available in the private sector. Therefore, the Health Department will issue a Request for Proposals for private providers interested in providing these services after January 1, 2010.

Due to the state budget cuts, the Health Department has eliminated positions in its fiscal year 2010 budget that were vacant due to the recent departure of two environmental health sanitarians, two fiscal/billing persons and one secretary. The discontinuation of family planning and sexually transmitted infection services will result in 10 currently filled positions being eliminated as of January 1, 2010. Four of those positions are state merit positions and two are full time. Five of the persons to be laid off are nurses, one is an office clerk, and four are interpreters. An additional eight persons will be reassigned to assist with the H1N1 influenza planning and response activities funded by a temporary H1N1 implementation grant. Layoff and reassignment decisions were based on seniority consistent with the state's process for layoff determinations.

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Due to the staffing reductions, a reorganization plan was presented to employees of the Health Department last week. The objective of the reorganization is to break down administrative silos to foster collaboration among programs with similar objectives and/or target populations.

Dr. Barbara Brookmyer stated, “The availability of funding presents enough of a barrier to full implementation of effective and meaningful public health initiatives. We don’t need to further compromise our efficiency and effectiveness by maintaining unnecessary administrative barriers.”

The Women, Infants and Children nutrition supplement program will move to administratively reside with the maternal and child health programs. The cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes prevention and injury prevention initiatives will move to administratively join the cancer prevention programs. As part of an enhanced focus on improving access to care by linking persons to existing programs, the enrollment and eligibility determination functions for the Maryland Children’s Health Program and the Administrative Care Coordination Unit for Medicaid will be joined together in a new unit.

Despite budgetary reductions, the Health Department will continue to provide core public health services to residents of Frederick County through food facility inspections, nuisance complaint investigations, pool inspections, well and septic inspections, communicable disease investigations, immunizations such as influenza vaccinations, health education about chronic disease and cancer prevention, maternal and child health support, substance abuse and mental health counseling, dental services and many other programs for children, families and businesses.

The Frederick County Health Department remains committed to its mission to prevent disease and illness, promote wellness and safety, and protect public health.

For further information on services provided by the Health Department, visit www.FrederickCountyMD.gov/healthdept or call the main number at 301-600-1029.

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