**Public Health Law Center for Oregon - A Proposal**

This proposal was written to generate interest in creating a public health law center in Oregon. The mission of this center would be to conduct legal analyses, research, and outreach to enhance efforts that use law and policy to improve population health. Users of a public health law center would include health departments and other government agencies, community organizations, elected officials, and businesses, among others.

The work of a public health law center would mostly be accomplished in partnership and in collaboration with existing entities in Oregon’s public health community. Possible projects include:

* Technical assistance to city and county agencies working on local ordinances that impact health (e.g., tobacco control, improving nutrition, transportation)
* Legal analysis of the public health components of Oregon’s legalization of recreational marijuana
* Before each legislative session, a training offered to legislators and their staffs on health law topics likely to be addressed in the upcoming session
* Research that evaluates the implementation and health outcomes of recently enacted laws and policies
* For a given health topic, use the existing national-level research and expertise to create model policies relevant to jurisdictions in Oregon
* Survey of legislative staff on public health matters, including where they obtain information on health issues

Public health law is a relatively new field of study. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the Network for Public Health Law in 2010, which includes five regional offices. The Western Regional office is at Arizona State University. Data from the Network for Public Health Law show that they receive far few technical assistance requests from states – such as Oregon – that are geographically distant from a regional center.

In recent history, Oregon has been a leader in passing public health laws. For example, Oregon was the first state to pass a comprehensive law mandating workplace accommodations for nursing mothers and Multnomah County was the third jurisdiction in the nation to pass restaurant menu labeling. Adoption of health-promoting polices 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.

A state-based center would be better able to use resources targeted to improving health in Oregon. A public health law center in Oregon could focus on creating materials and providing technical assistance that is pertinent to our state. An Oregon center could build on the current expertise at the Network for Public Health Law by providing additional analyses based on Oregon’s statutes and public health environment.

An Oregon center could focus on certain legal issues that are particularly relevant in Oregon, such as regulation of recreational marijuana. The Oregon center could also have a niche focusing on the intersection between healthcare delivery and public health, as the state is a leader in this area with the implementation of Coordinated Care Organizations.

In addition to legal analyses, an Oregon public health law center could conduct research studies that assess the health impacts of laws at the state and county levels, such as the 2014 ballot initiative legalizing recreational marijuana and new county ordinances regulating electronic cigarettes.

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 on their staffs. Local jurisdictions (e.g., cities and counties) have access to staff or contracted attorneys, but these attorneys may not have expertise in public health law. Businesses have begun to implement worksite wellness programs that often involve the adoption of worksite policies and rules. These businesses need to understand what policies are legally allowed and which policies have been shown to be effective at improving employee health.

Well-designed public health polices reach entire populations, including those communities that bear the greater burden of ill health which are often communities of color and low-income populations. One reason laws can be so effective at improving health over the long term is that laws remain in effect until they are repealed. While public health laws are in effect, they continue to improve the health of the population, including people who move into or are born into the jurisdiction.

The Logic Model below shows how an effective public health law center can lead to better health outcomes and reduced health care costs. Many entities have an interest in promoting these long-term outcomes, and are thus potential funders for a public health law center.

Funding for an Oregon public health law center would come from contracts and grants from health systems and health insurers, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and foundations. Public health law is gaining momentum locally and nationally, and funding opportunities are increasing.

**Logic Model**

Legal analyses and research conducted by a public health law center

More effective public health laws and policies

Better

health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs

Improved

health behaviors, improved delivery of healthcare