**Policy Statement**

**CLHO Committee:** Environmental Health

**Policy Statement:** The Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO) supports a strong system of improving local and state capacity to assess and manage risks associated with private wells to protect both the lifelong health of Oregonians and the state's groundwater resources.

**Policy Positions:** CLHO supports legislation that:

* Allocates funding to increase the public health workforce and capacity to assess and manage risks associated with private wells
* Increases local health department capacity to conduct public outreach and education
* Increases access to and awareness of data from drinking water test results
* Allows for enforcement of ORS 448.271 Real Estate Transaction Law[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Public Health Issue that Policy Statement is Addressing:**

* Surveillance and awareness of drinking water contaminants
* Community engagement and health equity

**Justification (data supporting the need to work on this issue):**

Approximately 23% of Oregonians rely on domestic wells, or private wells, as their primary source of potable water.[[2]](#footnote-2) This makes groundwater protection and well stewardship of high public health importance.

The federal Safe Drinking Water Act1 (SDWA) regulates the nation’s public drinking water supply, safeguarding drinking water for the majority of US residents. However, the SDWA does not apply to all drinking water sources. Privately owned wells serve approximately 12% of the US population, or 34 million residents. These smaller water systems do not meet the federal definition of a public water system and therefore are not regulated by federal law.

A study published in 2009 revealed that more than 1 in 5 sampled private wells were contaminated at unsafe levels.[[3]](#footnote-3) During 1971 to 2006, the percentage of outbreaks associated with private water sources increased, while the percentage of outbreaks associated with public water sources decreased.[[4]](#footnote-4)[[5]](#footnote-5)

Local grant projects that increase domestic well stewardship are limited in number and funding. The current funding opportunity has up to 2 awards of $10,000 the first year and $5,000 the second. In order to identify and engage vulnerable populations in education and outreach programs, capacity building at the local level needs to occur.

**Role of Local Public Health (promising practice/ evidenced-based work):**

Local public health has a crucial role in engaging the community and providing education programs to current and future homeowners. Local public health departments can bridge partnerships with homeowners, laboratories, OHA, extension services, water masters, certified well construction professionals and realtor associations. They work with small public water providers and are familiar with EPA drinking water standards.

In Oregon, current local public health resources are insufficient to maintain staffing for a Domestic Drinking water program. More could also be done around data collection and surveillance, population-based prevention, and focused outreach in areas where data shows water contaminants are commonly found.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Connection to Modernization Manual Foundational Programs/Capabilities:**

Foundational Programs:

Access to Clinical Preventative Services

Communicable Disease

Environmental Health

Health Promotion & Prevention

Foundational Capabilities:

Assessment & Epidemiology

Policy & Planning

Leadership & Organizational

Health Equity

Communications

Community Partnerships

Emergency Preparedness

1. Real Estate Transaction Law (requires that private wells are tested for arsenic, nitrate and total coliform bacteria and that results are provided to the buyer and the Oregon Health Authority, OHA) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Oregon Health Authority, Domestic Well Safety Program <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ph/HealthyEnvironments/DrinkingWater/SourceWater/DomesticWellSafety/Pages/index.aspx> . [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Desimone BLA, Hamilton PA, Gilliom RJ. Quality of Ground Water from Private Domestic Wells. *Water Well J*. 2009:1-6.

   <https://water.usgs.gov/nawqa/studies/domestic_wells/WaterWellJournalArticle_DeSimoneetal2009.pdf> . [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Craun G, Brunkard J, Yoder J. Causes of outbreaks associated with drinking water in the United States from 1971 to 2006. *Clin Microbiol Rev*. 2010;23(3):507-528. doi:10.1128/CMR.00077-09. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Closing the Water Quality Gap – Using policy to improve drinking water in federally-unregulated drinking water systems.” Change Lab Solutions. <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/Closing-the-Gap_Water_Regulation-%26-Policies_FACT_SHEET-FINAL_20170725.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Map Series” Oregon Domestic Well Testing <http://geo.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=c0d7daea497049c1a686d07dab7106e5> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)