



Connecticut Department of Public Health

Testimony Presented Before the Appropriations and Public Health Committees

September 21, 2020

Deidre S. Gifford, MD, MPH

The FFY 2021 Preventive Health and Health Services and the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grants

Good afternoon, Senators Osten, Formica, Abrams and Somers and Representatives Walker, Lavielle, Steinberg and Petit and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Public Health Committees. My name is Heather Aaron and I am Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Public Health (DPH). I am here to present the Department's proposed Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 Allocation Plans for the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHSBG) and the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant (MCHBG).

PHHSBG was established by Congress in 1981 to provide funding to address each state's unique public health needs in innovative and locally defined ways. This program gives grantees the flexibility to use funds to respond rapidly to emerging health issues and to fill funding gaps in programs that deal with the leading causes of death and disability. The criterion for use of the PHHSBG is that funds be utilized to support initiatives consistent with achieving *Healthy People Objectives*. These national, science-based objectives span ten years with the overall goal of improving the health of all Americans.

The proposed FFY 2021 funding estimate for Connecticut is based on the FFY 2020 funding level of \$2,293,948. The estimated FFY 2021 allocation will include a basic award of \$2,214,034, in addition to a mandated Sex Offense Set-Aside of \$79,914 intended to provide rape crisis services to rape victims. The Department has a contingency plan in place should an increase or reduction in funding occur. If the projected amount were to change, the Department would present options to the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant Advisory Committee and modify allocations based on Committee recommendations.

PHHSBG funds support work in asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, childhood lead poisoning, diabetes, smoking cessation, injury prevention, suicide prevention, and rape crisis programs. The funds also provide support for the State's emergency medical services, Connecticut's public health surveillance and evaluation efforts, and national and local public health accreditation initiatives.

Overall, this block grant supports an array of public health initiatives at both the state and local levels. Health priorities and program categories for FFY 2021 remain the same as those approved in FFY 2020.

***Phone: (860) 509-7269, Fax: (860) 509-7100, Telephone Device for the Deaf (860) 509-7191
410 Capitol Avenue - MS # 13GRE, P.O. Box 340308 Hartford, CT 06134
An Equal Opportunity Employer***

The MCHBG promotes the development of service systems in states to meet critical challenges in:

- reducing infant mortality;
- providing and ensuring access to comprehensive care for women;
- promoting the health of children by providing preventive and primary care services;
- increasing the number of children who receive health assessments and treatment services; and
- providing family centered, community based, and coordinated services for children and youth with special health needs (CYSHCN).

Per federal requirements, at least 30 percent of funds must be used for prevention and primary care services for children, and at least 30 percent must be used for children and youth with special health needs. There are a number of other administrative requirements that are referenced in the Allocation Plan. The Department is in compliance with all block grant requirements.

A variety of services are provided with MCHBG funds that meet the objectives as outlined in the Allocation Plan. These include case management services for pregnant women, maternal and child health information and referral services (2-1-1 Infoline), reproductive health services, oral health, school-based primary and behavioral health, infant health and well-being, newborn screening, and medical homes for children and youth with special health care needs.

Through this work, DPH staff have identified an alarming trend in data on perinatal indicators. Infant mortality rate, teen birth rate, low birth weight and lack of perinatal care was disproportionately higher for non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women than for non-Hispanic White women.¹ This trend has persisted for many years, and as such, Governor Lamont created the Gold Ribbon Commission on March 3, 2020. The Commission is charged with addressing the causes of maternal morbidity and mortality by examining the social determinants of health and racial and ethnic biases impacting women of color. The Commission is a collaboration between providers, community based organizations, state agencies, private agencies, and advocacy groups to explore innovative models of care that support health and well-being across the life cycle, foster healthy communities, establish and promote clinical practice guidelines as well as evidenced based practices. The work of the Commission has not formally begun as civil preparedness and public health emergency declarations were issued on March 10, 2020 to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

The MCHBG plan is based upon a proposed FFY 2021 budget of \$4,667,875. The proposed Allocation Plan incorporates precautionary measures in the event that the actual FFY 2021 award is less than this amount. Should it be necessary, the Department will review the criticality and performance of the various programs. Within the proposed plan, level funding as compared to the FFY 2020 estimated expenditure amount is proposed for the Perinatal Case Management, Reproductive Health Services, Information and Referral, Genetics, School Based Health

¹ Please reference Table D on page 16 of the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant Allocation Plan.

Services, and Medical Home Community Based Care Coordination Services program categories.

The proposed FFY 2021 plan will keep staff support for both the Maternal and Child Health and Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs programs level at 12.75 FTE and 9.25 FTE, respectively. It is proposed that \$111,833 be dedicated to supporting Other Maternal and Child Health activities in FFY 2021. This funding will support \$50,000 for upgrading laboratory computer software in order to ensure timely screening of newborns for Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Severe Combined Immunodeficiency. This funding will also provide \$40,000 for website improvements and upgrades for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs and School Based Health Centers (SBHCs) program pages, \$10,000 for the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, and \$11,833 for personal protective equipment supplies for SBHCs.

Thank you and I appreciate your consideration of these Block Grant Allocation Plans. If you have any questions, agency staff and I will be happy to answer them.