

September 25, 2008

Dear Seattle King County Nurse:

WSNA has taken the lead state wide to address the public health funding crisis. Please read this material carefully, with special attention to the "Save Public Health" website. From that site you can print a brochure to post in your car or grocery store, you can find letters to send to the editor of your newspaper from both nurses as well as others for your friends and family members to send as concerned citizens. There are sample letters on the website that you can print to send to your local County Board or council members. Links to statewide news articles are there along with various other resources for you to use. Please check back often as the website will be updated frequently. Later this month fliers will be available to hand out to the public, and "Save Public Health" bumper stickers are being printed.

### **WSNA Campaign to Save Public Health**

Our public health system is at a crisis point. Facing budget shortfalls, Counties across the State are considering dangerous cuts to public health services and funding. The Washington State Nurses Association knows that our communities can't afford any more reductions in public health. In response to this looming crisis, WSNA has launched a new campaign to save public health.

The goal of the WSNA Campaign to Save Public Health is to:

- Educate the public and policymakers about the importance of public health;
- Raise awareness about the current funding crisis;
- Give people the information and tools to get involved;
- Prevent additional cuts at the local level;
- Secure a long-term adequate and stable source of funding for public health.

This issue is a top priority for WSNA because public health and public health nursing are the foundation of our health care system. It is the most cost effective system for disease prevention and health improvement and is also our first line of defense in responding to bioterrorism and in disaster preparedness. Yet, only 2% of the total health care dollars are spent on public health services, and Washington ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in per capita spending on public health. Public health funding in Washington State has been grossly inadequate over the past decade. These additional cuts, as proposed by many of the Counties, will place communities at unacceptable risk.

#### **Public Education/Media:**

The public education/media portion of the campaign includes opinion editorials, letters to the editor, e-mails to County officials, paid advertising, flyers, and bumper stickers.

The 4 week advertising campaign (September 16<sup>th</sup> -October 19<sup>th</sup>) in Spokane, King, Snohomish and Whatcom County will feature billboards and bus boards to draw attention to this crisis. We will reach nearly 200,000 viewers daily and over 5 million viewers throughout the month at the following locations:

- Spokane – 3 billboards at Washington & Boone, Lincoln & Broadway, and Broadway & Monroe
- Everett – 2 billboards on Broadway and Rucker
- Bellingham – 5 bus boards in downtown
- Seattle – 15 bus boards in Seattle and 6 billboards on Rainier, Lake City Way, Meridian, Queen Anne Ave, Boren, and Smith in Kent.

## **Launch of new website - [www.SavePublicHealth.com](http://www.SavePublicHealth.com):**

A critical part of the WSNA Campaign on Public Health is the launch of a new website. It will serve as the central resource center for:

- information about the crisis
- background on public health and public health nursing
- action alert center with easy ways to send messages to your County officials
- sample letters to the editor
- links and resources
- update on WSNA's efforts

## **WSNA Summit on Public Health:**

With funding for public health in jeopardy in Counties across the state, WSNA hosted the 'Summit on Public Health' to address this looming crisis. Held on Friday, September 12<sup>th</sup>, the packed room of over 40 key stakeholders demonstrated the pressing need and importance of the forum. Attendees came from all corners of the State and represented a variety of organizations and interests in public health ranging from public health district administrators to government officials to leaders of health care and advocacy organizations.

The goals and plan produced by this work session include:

- Educating as many people as possible about what public health is and why it's the foundation of our healthcare system. An education campaign would be both a short-term and long-term effort, with the immediate goal of preventing any more cuts in public health funding. The media needs to be engaged in the issue to raise awareness among the general public. Policy-makers might need a more data-driven approach in addition to the personal stories.
- Personalizing public health and making everyone feel connected to it. Personal stories of people helped by public health, compelling visuals of public health, and specific examples of the cost saving public health provides over the long-term were all raised as potential outreach tools.
- Broadening the coalition of support for public health by engaging as many stakeholders as possible including business, labor, other health interests and the public. Keep momentum and support for public health strong throughout the legislative session so that public health remains a top priority when final budget decisions are being made.
- Using the group gathered at the Summit on Public Health as a foundation for this coalition and planning follow-up meetings so that the energy of the summit is not lost. The Public Health Roundtable was also discussed as a potential driving organization for these efforts, possibly requiring the addition of a full-time, dedicated project manager.
- Beginning to research where public opinion lies on this issue in preparation for some kind of ballot measure to fund public health. It is suspected that awareness is very low but that most people, if educated on the subject, would be in favor of increasing public health funding. Such research would be necessary before launching any kind of ballot initiative or referendum.

At the conclusion of the summit, there was agreement and enthusiasm for the group to reconvene in three months to evaluate progress and build on the work of the summit. WSNA will also report back on the success of the Campaign to Save Public Health and discuss next steps for the campaign. With many Counties working through budget processes during the fall, the next meeting will focus on action steps on the County level to prevent any more cuts to public health services or funding as well as action steps on the state level to secure additional public health funding in the 2009 Legislative session.

Please contact me if you have questions or suggestions to help with this campaign!

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