Follow-up on Communicable Disease and Epidemiology Audit

Public Health – Seattle & King County has completed all of the audit recommendations, helping to improve King County's ability to quickly respond to disease outbreaks. Public Health – Seattle & King County (PHSKC) has played a vital role in the responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and has improved processes that can help them to do so effectively. Increases in Foundational Public Health Services funding have allowed PHSKC to increase the Communicable Disease and Epidemiology Program's (CD-Epi) staffing by 22%, giving them more flexibility to re-assign work to address emergency outbreak needs. PHSKC Human Resources has also improved guidance on the hiring of temporary staff, ensuring that managers have the information they need readily available during emergencies to request additional staff.

While Public Health – Seattle & King County has completed all the audit recommendations, they indicate that quickly hiring staff during emergencies is still a challenge. Even with improved guidance, PHSKC representatives indicated that the overall hiring process for temporary staff (referred to as surge staffing) still takes a minimum of six weeks and represents a significant burden for already overloaded staff. To help address this, PHSKC has gathered and synthesized feedback to help inform improvements to surge hiring processes. By taking action on continued challenges to surge staffing, PHSKC can continue to refine its surge hiring processes to ensure that PHSKC can hire needed staff efficiently and effectively during disease outbreaks.

Of the 13 audit recommendations:

12 DONE	0 PROGRESS	0 OPEN	1 CLOSED
Fully implemented Auditor will no longer monitor.	**Partially implemented** Auditor will continue to monitor.	**Remain unresolved** Auditor will continue to monitor.	**No longer applicable** Auditor will no longer monitor.

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

| Recommendation 1 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 2 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 3 | | CLOSED | ✗ |

The Prevention Division of the Department of Public Health – Seattle & King County should work with the Department of Public Health to document a plan for future unanticipated costs incurred by communicable disease response.

STATUS UPDATE: PHSKC received increases in Foundational Public Health Services funding in 2021, which allowed them to increase staff capacity within the Prevention Division (Prevention) of PHSKC. Prevention received an additional $325,000 a year to support Hepatitis C work, as well as an additional $1,400,000 to support the addition of seven full-time employees to the Communicable Disease and Epidemiology (CD-Epi) program. This represents a 22% increase in the CD-Epi's staff levels. PHSKC representatives indicate that this staffing increase will allow them the flexibility they need to effectively re-assign CD-Epi work during outbreaks. Given that this recommendation was meant to ensure that CD-Epi had access to the staff they needed during disease outbreaks, by funding ongoing new positions PHSKC has met the intent of this recommendation.

| Recommendation 4 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 5 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 6 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 7 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 8 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

| Recommendation 9 | On December 28, 2018 | DONE | ✓ |

Recommendation 10   DONE ✓

The Human Resources section of the Department of Public Health – Seattle & King County should document and communicate its criteria for meeting its requirements for justifying short-term temporary position requests.

STATUS UPDATE: PHSKC Human Resources developed and shared guidance on how to request expedited short-term temporary (STT) or term-limited temporary (TLT) positions in case of an urgent outbreak at the time of the 2018 follow-up report. At the time of the 2018 follow-up, expedited STT and TLT hiring hadn't been extensively needed since the time of the original audit, so we were unable to assess whether the new guidance was adequate. With the COVID-19 pandemic, Prevention has had extensive new experience responding to disease outbreaks. Prevention representatives report that the guidance PHSKC Human Resources provided was successful in articulating the process for appointing an STT or TLT position during a disease outbreak. Because Prevention representatives indicate that hiring STTs and TLTs in a timely manner is still a challenge even with better guidance, Prevention recently assessed their surge hiring processes and developed recommendations to improve and expedite the surge outbreak process.

IMPACT: Completion of this recommendation ensures that the criteria for STT and TLT positions is clear to staff when surge staffing is needed, preventing a lack of clarity from unnecessarily slowing down the hiring processes. Prevention representatives indicate that the hiring process is still time-intensive and places a burden on staff in the midst of disease outbreaks, however. While the actions taken by PHSKC satisfy this recommendation, PHSKC should continue to refine its surge hiring processes to ensure that PHSKC can hire needed staff efficiently and effectively during disease outbreaks.

Recommendation 11   On December 28, 2018   DONE ✓

Recommendation 12   On December 28, 2018   DONE ✓

Recommendation 13   On December 28, 2018   DONE ✓

Kayvon Zadeh conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov or 206-477-1033.