

The logo features the text "#CACantWait" in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font, with "UNTIL THE NEXT CRISIS" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font below it. The text is set against a dark blue rectangular background.

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With California's Public Health Heroes Still on Frontlines Fighting Deadly Pandemic, Newsom's Budget Would Slash Funds to Rebuild Decimated Workforce

SACRAMENTO, CA — California Can't Wait, a coalition of public health officials, local leaders, frontline workers, and health equity advocates expressed dismay over Governor Newsom's January state budget proposal that seeks to slash roughly \$49.8 million in urgently needed funds promised in last year's budget to develop the next generation of public health heroes.

"We are disappointed that Governor Newsom's budget fails to recognize that California Can't Wait to rebuild our local public health workforce pipeline that responds to existing and emerging public health threats and make progress toward our health equity goals," said **Michelle Gibbons, Executive Director of the County Health Executives Association of California**. "Unfortunately, this budget repeats the same mistakes of our past: returning to the boom and bust approach of funding our public health workforce is what left California vulnerable to COVID-19 and left crucial work to address social determinants of health undone."

"The pandemic taught us that disinvestment in public health systems and the public health workforce is a deadly gamble. We need to learn that lesson," said **David Green, President of SEIU Local 721 and SEIU CA Executive Board Member**. "SEIU members will be fighting for full funding to rebuild and strengthen our public health workforce."

"Public health is not a luxury, it's a necessity. The public health workforce is not optional. Every Californian deserves to have a fully-staffed and well-trained local health department, said **Kat DeBurgh, Executive Director of the Health Officers Association of California**. "Pandemic protection is every bit as important as flood protection."

"The Governor's desire to cut funding for public health is dangerously shortsighted," said **Harold Goldstein, DrPH, Executive Director of Public Health Advocates**. "The most glaring lesson from the COVID pandemic is that cuts to the public health workforce might save a few dollars today, but they will cost the state a fortune -- in money and in lives -- in the years to come. Please, Mr. Newsom, let's not make the same mistake again."

The Governor's budget protects \$300M ongoing funding the California Can't Wait Coalition secured in FY 22-23 to begin to rebuild our local and state public health infrastructure. The coalition praised the maintenance of these urgently needed investments, while cautioning that the state must strengthen its frontline public health workforce to protect California's progress in defeating COVID-19 and future threats.

A strong, local public health workforce is essential to defend against disease, deliver on the promise of health equity, and keep businesses and schools open in the face of a threat like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is still taking lives, a stark reminder that California can't backtrack on rebuilding the local public health workforce pipeline that protects our communities.

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, California Can't Wait was successful in securing one-time PublicHERO grant funding beginning in FY 2022-23 to develop the future public health lab directors, epidemiologists, microbiologists, public health nurses, and public health professionals needed to address health inequities and protect Californians from rising rates of STDs, diabetes, syphilis, tuberculosis, and chronic diseases. The Governor's January proposed state budget eliminates these crucial investments, once again threatening the urgent progress needed to respond to existing and emerging public health threats, advocates say.

"In the face of the great resignation, with public health leaders and professionals at all levels leaving the field after nearly three years of stress, burnout, and harassment during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that more work remains to be done to recruit, retain, educate, and train the next generation of public health professionals to respond to growing health inequities perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic," added **Gibbons**. "We look forward to working with our California Can't Wait partners and public health heroes in the legislature to see that these crucial investments are made."

Background

Over the past decade and more, local public health departments have lost 20 percent of their public health workforce due to systemic disinvestment. Many of our public health professions

require high levels of training and education or advanced degrees and certification that are hard to fill due to a shortage of qualified workers and competition.

Historic underfunding coupled with stress, burnout, and harassment during the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the public health workforce and is projected to cause additional public health workers to leave the field. According to the [Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey](#) conducted in March 2022 by the de Beaumont Foundation and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, of nearly 45,000 state and local public health workers:

- More than half of public health employees report at least one symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder;
- Many public health workers, especially executives, report bullying, threats, and harassment; and
- **Nearly 1 in 3 public health employees say they are considering leaving their organization within the next year**

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